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PABLO DE SEGOVIA
THE SPANISH SHARPER
TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL OF FRANCISCO DE QUEVEDO-VILLEGAS

AN ESSAY ON THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF QUEVEDO BY HENRY EDWARD WATTS

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QUEVEDO AND HIS WORKS:

With an Essay on the Picaresque *Novel.*

NOT more unquestioned is Cervantes' claim to be the first of Spanish humorists than that of Quevedo to be the second. Among his own countrymen the title, which is generally the more disputable, has been by a singular consensus of opinion assigned to Quevedo. The author of *Don Quixote* apart, who is with the Immortals, there is no greater name among the writers of Spain than that of the author of *The Visions*, of *Don Pablo*, of innumerable poems, pamphlets, satires, pieces of wit, and works serious, moral, sportive, and fanciful. In that Golden Age, prolific of authors, the hundred years between the birth of Cervantes and the prime of Calderon, there was no genius so fruitful in every kind of intellectual product. Poet, politician, humorist, satirist, theologian, moralist, historian, novelist—Quevedo stands out a prodigy of learning, wit, and quick and various invention, even among the crowd of gifted writers who made that period famous in letters. He has been called the Spanish Juvenal—the Spanish Ovid—the Spanish Lucian. He is something of all these, and yet is unlike any of them. He wrote lyrics with the grace, simplicity, and ease of Horace. He is as prodigal of humour as Rabelais, whom he resembles also in his unfastidiousness, his obscurity, and his extravagance. He has been likened to our English Swift, to whom he is akin in the quality of his mordant wit, and almost approaches in his anti-humanity; but he is lacking in the creative force of the author of *Gulliver*. Not unlike Swift was Quevedo in fortune as in genius, for it was disappointed ambition which wore out his heart and drove him to satire, to visions, and assaults on human folly and vice.

From his earliest years Quevedo was marked for distinction. When scarcely more than twenty-three he corresponded with the great scholars of Germany and the Low Countries, the great Lipsius hailing him as *magnum decus Hispanorum*, and in complimentary epistles urging him to undertake the vindication of Homer. If we may

believe the contemporary records, Quevedo had by this time acquired all profane knowledge and human learning. He was versed in all the languages, even Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic. He began to write early, and continued to write during the whole of his busy and turbulent life, with an industry, energy, and fecundity which made him the wonder of his age. The catalogue of his works embraces every department of authorship, and there appears to be no species of composition, from an exhortation to a holy life to the more than ribald canzonet, which he did not attempt. The gayest themes were as much to his mind as the gravest studies, and from *Paul the Apostle* he could pass at will to *Paul the Sharper*, with no apparent effort of wit or strain of conscience. Some of his works have been lost, but enough remains to testify to the astonishing vigour, exuberance, and versatility of his genius. There are religious treatises and biographies of saints, a *Defence of the Faith*, and a homily on the sacred cradle and sepulchre. There is a metrical translation of *Epictetus*, and another of (the false) *Phocylides*. There is a life of *Marcus Brutus*. There are letters to kings and statesmen, and tracts on the currency. There are satires in verse and lampoons in prose. There are poems, odes, ballads, and sonnets innumerable. Even the drama he did not leave unattempted, though his comedies have perished, together with many other works, including *Considerations on the New Testament* and a *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*. Finally, there is the *picaresque* novel here presented to the English reader under the title of *Don Pablo de Segovia*, or *Paul the Sharper*.

Francisco de Quevedo, or, to give him his full title, Francisco de Gomez de Quevedo Villegas, was born at Madrid on the 26th of September, 1580. He was thus thirty-three years younger than Cervantes, eighteen years younger than Lope de Vega, and some twenty years older than Calderon. His father had been a servant to the Emperor Charles V., and his mother was a lady in attendance upon Philip II.'s fourth wife, Anne of Austria. The family of Quevedo drew its source from the mountains of Old Castile, near Burgos. This was a circumstance of which every good Spaniard of the age was proud, as proving that he was descended from the pure Gothic race, who maintained their hold of the

soil even after the Moorish invasion, and therefore was an *old Christian*, of blood unmixed with Moor or Jew. From his parents' position the young Francisco must have been early trained in the life of the Court and brought into contact with those who dispensed the power and patronage of the king. He was educated at the University of Alcalá de Henares, then in the height of its fame. At fifteen he graduated in theology, and soon afterwards acquired great distinction for his attainments in the civil and common law and in the learned languages. That he was early distinguished as a scholar is proved by his correspondence with Lipsius and other foreign men of learning, by whom he was addressed as an equal. For some time, however, Quevedo seems to have lived the usual life of a gay cavalier of the Court, indulging, as he confesses himself, in the pleasures of his age and the time, and taking part in those adventures which formed matter for his lighter works. At twenty-three he was already a poet distinguished enough to be included in Espinosa's *Flores de Poetas Ilustres* (1603). A few years afterwards was published the first collection of his prose satires, which are better known to the world as *Visions*—the *Zahurdas de Pluton* (*Pigstyes of Pluto*), with a dedication to the Conde de Lemos—a Mæcenas of the period, to whom afterwards Cervantes dedicated the second part of his *Don Quixote*. The pieces which are known as *Visions* are among the most characteristic and original, as they have been the most popular, of all Quevedo's works. They bear such titles as *El Sueño de las Calaveras* (*The Dream of Skulls*); *El Alguacil Alguacilado* (*The Catchpole Caught*); *Visita de los Chistes* (*Visitation of the Jests*); *El Mundo por de Dentro* (*The World Inside Out*); *El Entremetido, la Dueña, y el Soplon* (*The Intermeddler, the Duenna, and the Informer*); and (the authorship of which is more doubtful) *La Casa de los Locos de Amor* (*The House of the Love-Madmen*). These, which were published at various times, are satires of a kind then new to the world, or known only in the works of Lucian; audacious and somewhat extravagant of conception; abounding in wit, in fancy, and in humour; various in character and in design, but all intended to ridicule or censure some reigning folly or vice or abuse. They

have been called *Visions* because most of them are cast in the form of dreams, in which the author takes us into the world below, among the Devil and his attendants, who are introduced with many lively touches of wit and strokes of humour. It is an invention which has been in favour with poets and satirists of all time, from Lucian to Dante, and from Dante to Lord Byron.

By these *Visions* (by himself never so called collectively) the name of Quevedo has been chiefly made known out of Spain. They are among the most characteristic of his works, in which his audacious humour and impetuous fancy found full exercise and a congenial element. They have been often translated into the various European languages, and were much read and quoted in the commerce of letters. Besides these, the *Visions* proper, which are serious satires levelled at the abuses and the evils of the times, there were numerous other squibs, jests, and pasquinades, of less solid substance or of lower aim, in rebuke of the fashionable follies or the vulgar tastes, such as *El Cuento de los Cuentos* (*The Tale of Tales*), which is levelled at the excessive use of proverbs; *El Caballero de la Tenaza* (*The Knight of the Forceps*), being the apology of a miser for himself; *La Perinola* (*The Teetotum*), which is a personal attack on the fussy and frivolous Perez de Montalvan, one of Quevedo's favourite butts. There are numerous others, of which the very titles are so coarse as not to be fit for mention—ephemeral and obscure, which have died with the occasions which gave them birth.

That at least before 1613 Quevedo was esteemed, by those best capable of judging, as among the best wits of the time, appears from the very flattering notice of him which is contained in Cervantes' *Viage del Parnaso* (*Voyage to Parnassus*). He is there called *Apollo's son—son of the Muse Calliope;* and his aid is declared to be absolutely necessary in the war which the god of poetry is about to wage with the bad poets. It is true that Cervantes was in the habit of praising almost everybody, but from the warmth of the terms used, and from other indications in Quevedo's own works, we may infer that the two greatest wits of the period had, as great wits rarely have, a just appreciation of each other. Lope de Vega also, who was of a different order of genius,

as well of a nature dissimilar, ever suspicious of a rival and jealous of the applause given to another, could bring himself to speak of Quevedo in his *Laurel de Apolo* as *prince of the lyric poets*, the Juvenal of Spanish verse, who might rival Pindar and replace Apollo himself if the god were to fail.

But before Quevedo had made his name in letters he was destined to earn distinction in a public career, which afforded him a rare opportunity for displaying the versatility of his talents and the soundness of his judgment. Debarred from the profession of arms by his physical infirmity—he was lame of both feet from his birth—he was driven to seek a career in civil employment. An adventure which befell him at Madrid served to fix his destiny. Being in a church at Madrid during the Holy Week, he saw a gallant of the Court offer a gross insult to a modest woman. He interfered to protect her, swords were drawn, and Quevedo slew the aggressor. The slain man being discovered to be a person of rank, nearly related to those who had power at Court, Quevedo was forced to fly the country, taking refuge in Sicily, then a dependency of Spain. The governor or viceroy of the island was Don Pedro Tellez Giron, Duke of Osuna, a powerful grandee, of whom it was said that *nature made him a very little gentleman and his deeds a very great lord;* a man of mark in the civil and military transactions of Philip III. Quevedo was made his secretary by the Duke, and employed in many delicate and important affairs of state, in all of which he is declared to have proved, on the Duke's own testimony, his prudence, courage, and ability. The Duke of Osuna was transferred, in 1615, from the government of Sicily to that of Naples, and thither he was followed by Quevedo, who was made Minister of Finance. In the interval between his employment in Sicily and his higher office at Naples, Quevedo was despatched to Madrid on a confidential mission in connection with the revenues of the island, and was able to commend himself so greatly to the authorities that the affair of the fatal duel was condoned and a pension of four hundred ducats bestowed on him. At Naples Quevedo discharged his duties of financial secretary with great ability and conspicuous success, so that we are told that, while he reduced the

burdens of the people, he augmented the revenues of the State. During the years following he seems to have been employed in various high and secret diplomatic businesses in connection with the policy of the ambitious and turbulent Duke, his master, being entrusted with the duties of a plenipotentiary at Rome and at Venice, and managing them, according to the contemporary historians, with much address and discretion. In the course of his political adventures Quevedo was involved, in 1617, in that strange affair among conspiracies which has since been so great a puzzle to historians, the so-called *Conjuracion de Venise*, which has furnished St. Real with a subject for his history, and Otway with characters and a plot for his tragedy. Whether there really was, on the part of the Spanish Viceroy of Naples, an attempt to overthrow the government of the Venetian Republic, or whether, as later historians are inclined to believe, the whole business was planned by the agents of the Venetian Senate to enable them to reach certain of their political enemies, is a question which is still under controversy—a controversy in which we are not concerned to take a part. Certain it is that Quevedo contrived, as an agent of Spain, to make himself a person the most ungrateful to the Republic, which pursued him, for some months afterwards, with a fury of hate and bitterness of malice, which, though flattering to his character of political *intriguant*, seem irreconcilable with the theory of his innocence. He even ran a narrow risk of losing his life when on a visit, apparently secret and unauthorized, to Venice. He was chased by the officers of justice, and only escaped, we are told, through the completeness of his disguise, being habited in the rags of a beggar, and his perfect command of the Venetian dialect. He had the honour of being afterwards burnt in effigy, a compliment he returned by pouring a stream of invective on Venice and her government out of the resources of his abundant rhetoric. Venice he called *the lumber-house of the world—the toll-booth of princes—a republic such as cannot be credited and cannot be forgotten—greater than it is fitting for her to be, and less than she gives herself out to be; powerful in treaties, and feeble in power; sumptuous in arsenals, profuse in ships; terrible to those who fear the hulks of a fleet, where fleet is none—a dominion which exposes the*

hollowness of many fears. It is a state the more prone to dissensions of all that exist, more hurtful to her friends than to her enemies, whose embrace is a peaceful war,—with a good deal else, in a tone which savours of very bitter recollections.

Quevedo had now arrived at the zenith of his fame and fortunes. In 1617 he was in Madrid, where he was received with great honour by the King, Philip III., and his minister, the all-powerful Duke of Lerma. He was advanced to the much-coveted distinction of a Knight of the Order of Santiago. The highest posts seemed to be awaiting him at home, through favour of the feeble and besotted King, then under the influence of a corrupt and incapable favourite, who was himself ruled by his minion, Don Rodrigo Calderon. The ambition of Quevedo, as all his serious works clearly show, was rather for power as a man of affairs than for fame as a man of letters. But now he was destined to encounter a sudden change of fortune. The death of Philip III. brought to the throne, in 1621, his son, Philip IV., then a lad of seventeen, under the dominion of his gentleman of the bedchamber, known to history as the Count-Duke Olivares. All the principal officers of the late administration were dismissed in disgrace. Even the powerful and able Duke of Osuna, whose brilliant and successful rule in Naples had shed so much lustre on the reign of the feeble Philip III., was recalled from his post. His ministers and secretaries were involved in his fate. Quevedo was sentenced to exile from Court, and confined to his patrimonial village of La Torre de Juan Abad, where he was kept in a kind of imprisonment for more than three years. To a man of his fervid temperament and aspiring hopes this was a punishment worse than death, which seems for ever after to have embittered his soul and soured his temper. Writing to the President of Castile to complain of his miserable state and the treatment to which he was subjected, he tells him that *he had seen many men condemned to death, but no one condemned to make away with himself.* He was ultimately allowed to go free without being told of what charge there had been against him or any reason given for his detention Henceforth Quevedo seems to have abandoned all hopes of preferment at Court, exhibiting more philosophy and more steadfastness in his resolve to abstain

from further thoughts of political life than other men of letters have shown, in a similar turn of fate, who have been endowed with the same taste for the delights of office. He seems to have recovered some portion of the royal favour. He was offered various high posts in the State, among others the embassy to Genoa, but he refused them, and would only accept the honorary title of King's Secretary. He did not wholly exclude himself from politics, however, but, like Swift, continued to vex himself with public affairs, showing by his sensibility to the follies and errors of statesmen where his heart lay, and what was the secret of the *sæva indignatio* by which he was tortured. He was free with his pen in condemnation of crying abuses and defects in the administration. He was prolific of letters, pamphlets, and satires in prose and verse, all written with a boldness and freedom to which the age was unaccustomed, which brought their author frequently into trouble. He assailed a scheme for the debasement of the coinage with a courage and a power of wit and sarcasm such as were not excelled even by the famous Drapier, on the same theme, a hundred years later. He exposed certain abuses in the distribution of the patronage of the military order of Santiago with a fearlessness which cost him another period of banishment from Court. He wrote letters to the King of France (Louis XIII.) and others, more or less directly impugning the conduct of affairs then under the worthless favourite, the Count-Duke of Olivares.

In 1634 Quevedo, being in his fifty-fourth year, married—to the surprise, and somewhat to the amusement, of his friends. His way of life hitherto had scarcely been such as to proclaim his confidence in the married state; and a letter which he had written to his friend, the widowed Duchess of Lerma, on the qualities required of a wife, had seemed to set his standard of taste so high as to condemn him to celibacy. His wife died soon after their marriage, leaving Quevedo with fresh troubles, arising out of his satirical humour, or rather from his reputation for satire. He had betaken himself, after his wife's death, to his country retreat at Torre de Juan Abad to seek consolation in literature; and this was probably his busiest period of production. He wrote a life of Marcus Brutus, of which the scarcely concealed intention was

to point to the Cæsar who then tyrannized over Spain. He aimed satires in verse, after the classical model, at the reigning favourite. He wrote the *Politica de Dios y Gobierno de Cristo* (*Policy of God and Government of Christ*), which, under the guise of a religious work, was a biting satire on the King and the Count-Duke. He wrote other works, some of which have perished, distinguished by elegance of style and energy of expression, none of them deserving of more than a passing mention, and all belonging rather to the political history than to the literature of Spain. To this period also, probably, are to be referred the greater part of those satirical works, under the name of *Visions*, which have chiefly contributed to make the name of Quevedo known to the nations outside of Spain—those bitter, half-humorous, half-serious, and all-fantastical inventions, such as *The Dream of Skulls* and *The World Inside Out*.

In 1639, when it might have seemed to him that Fortune had already done her worst to plague him, and he had no more either to hope or fear from kings or ministers, there happened to Quevedo the worst of all the calamities which marked his busy and troubled life. A satirical sonnet was found under the King's napkin at supper, which contained violent reflections on the Government of the Count-Duke Olivares. Quevedo was believed to be the author, and, without any inquiry or trial, he was seized at dead of night, in the Duke of Medina Celi's palace, and hurried off to a dungeon under the cells of the Royal Convent of San Marcos at Leon. Here he was kept in strict confinement for nearly four years, in spite of a pitiful appeal to Olivares, in which, while protesting his innocence of the offence imputed to him, Quevedo wrote: *No clemency can add many years to my life; no rigour can take many away.* He was asked to declare which of the many satires there were going about were his and which were not, but he returned a proud and disdainful answer. The real author of the lampoon for which Quevedo was punished was discovered soon after, but this made little or no difference in the treatment to which he was subjected. In vain did he entreat the Count-Duke for justice and relief. He pleaded that he was blind of the left eye, crippled, and afflicted with ulcers,

declaring that he sought not liberty but change of regimen and of prison, *and this change, the gospel says, Christ granted to a great number of devils who besought it of Him.* In vain were all these pleas. They were probably glad to be able to silence, on any pretext, that bold and biting tongue, which had already done so much to proclaim to posterity the iniquities of the Government. It was not until after the fall of the Count-Duke himself, amidst the rejoicings of the whole nation, that Quevedo was restored to liberty. But his four years' imprisonment, during part of which time he had been treated, as he complains, *like a wild beast* shut up alone without human intercourse, had ruined his health and broken his spirits. His estate had been sequestrated, and he was never able to recover more than a small part of it, so that poverty was added, for the first time in his life, to his other trials. Worn out by his infirmities, he died at last, of an imposthume in the chest, contracted during his imprisonment in a damp cell of the Convent, on the 8th of September, 1645, having previously made his peace with God and the Church in the usual manner.

More fortunate than his master and great contemporary, Cervantes, Quevedo survives in canvas and in marble, so that we are able to realize the external features of the man. His portrait by Velasquez, representing him with a huge pair of spectacles on his nose and the cross of Santiago on his left bosom, is that by which he is best known. There is also a bust of him in the Public Library at Madrid. The first of his biographers, the Neapolitan Tarsia, has drawn this picture of him, evidently from recollection, in words: *Quevedo was of middling stature; his hair black and somewhat frizzled* (encrespado), *his eyes very brilliant, but so short of sight that he constantly wore spectacles; the nose and other features well proportioned; and of a medium frame well made above, although lame and crippled in both feet, which were twisted inwards; somewhat bulky without being misshapen; very fair of countenance, and in the main with all those marks co-existent in his person which physiognomists commend as indicating a good temperament and a virtuous disposition.* His biography by Tarsia, published in 1663, is a dull and tedious piece of work. By far the best account of Quevedo

is that which I have made the basis of this sketch, the biography attached to the only complete collection of Quevedo's works, by Don Aureliano Fernandez Guerra y Orbe, which forms three volumes in Rivadeneyra's *Biblioteca de los Autores Españoles*. The *Essai sur la Vie et les Œuvres de Quevedo*, by Ernest Merimée (Paris, 1886), is a careful and painstaking work, of which the materials have been taken from Guerra y Orbe.

To judge the character of the man is easier for posterity than to estimate the worth of his products in literature. The greater part of his writings, those which brought him most fame in his lifetime, men have ceased to read even in Spain itself. Of the eleven octavo volumes which constituted the first complete edition of Quevedo's works (1791–94) it may be said that it would be no loss to the world had three-fourths shared the doom which their author, on his death-bed, requested might overtake them all. The orthodox would thus have been saved much scandal, the expurgators a great deal of trouble, the critics and the commentators an endless amount of curious inquiry. The theology and the politics (these in Quevedo are much confused) have already perished. The satires have been visited by the destiny which invariably attends the works of wit which are dedicated to passing uses, when literature stoops to the service of politics.

But while the graver works of Quevedo, those which won him the applause of the learned and the favour of the great, have perished or are sunk into oblivion, there have survived enough of those lighter pieces born of his humour or his fancy, which he could scarcely be got to own in his lifetime, to keep his name alive and to secure for him a permanent place in literature. His lyrics are among the best in the language, and still keep their place in every collection of classic Castilian poetry. Those written in his early days, which include odes, sonnets, ballads, *quintillas*, and *redondillas*, mostly cast in a light and graceful mould, are distinguished for elegance of language, delicacy of fancy, and simple, tender expression. His burlesque poems (which include some pieces of a breadth such as excludes them from polite society), written in the *picaresque* dialect, of which, like Cervantes, he was a

past master—the *Jácaras*, in which the people, the *gitanos*, the *jaques*, and the *buzos*, speak the language of *Germania*—the *langue verte* of Spain —are said still to be heard in the country, sung to the strumming of guitars. His regular verse is chiefly satire in the manner of Juvenal, against the corruption of morals and the evils of misgovernment. Of his prose writings the best are those which are purely sportive and fanciful, without serious intention, as the *Visita de los Chistes*, where he makes pleasant fun of the personages which figure in the old proverbs and popular sayings, as Mateo Pico, who is enshrined in the phrase, *No dijerá mas Mateo Pico;* Agrages, the boaster from *Amadis of Gaul*, who is for ever quoted as saying, *Agora lo verédes* (see *Don Quixote*, *passim*); Pero Grullo, the prophet who prophesied only of what he knew had come to pass; Calainos, of the ballad *Cabalgaba Calainos;* Don Diego de Noche; Marta, who is for ever expressing her satisfaction that though she died she died with a bellyful; and Villadiego, whose breeches have immortalized his name; with Juan Ramos, and the rest. The fun which Quevedo makes out of this flimsy material is only to be understood by those who know the proverbs of Spain, and the great part they play in the national talk and literature.

Less innocent, perhaps, are some of Quevedo's other burlesque pieces, which neither gods, men, nor county councillors may allow. In these the poet sins, however, more from carelessness of humour than grossness of imagination. It is not his ideas that are nasty so much as his words which are coarse. He uses words at random, and is reckless of the effect produced, letting his fancy run away with his pen, to the detriment of his art. He is wanting in the exquisite simplicity and delicacy of the master of whose work he was a chief admirer, whose style he followed, and in whose path he attempted to walk—his friend, Miguel de Cervantes. So passionate was his love for *Don Quixote* that we are told he would throw down the book in an ecstasy and declare that he would gladly burn all his works to be able to write something like *Don Quixote*. Between the two wits it is pleasant to record that there was nothing like jealousy. Cervantes, in the references he makes to Quevedo, seems to speak with more than his wonted kindliness

of the younger man, as though from personal intimacy. In the *Voyage to Parnassus* Quevedo is rallied upon his lameness with a freedom which only a friend might take. In summing up the roll of the good poets who are to be Apollo's allies in the winning of Parnassus, the name of Quevedo is last on the list. But Cervantes interrupts the god-messenger to remind him of Quevedo's infirmity:—

Scarce can Francisco de Quevedo be
In time, I said. Nay, quoth he, on this cruise
I do not go, unless he go with me;
He is Apollo's son, son of the Muse
Calliope; we cannot, it is clear,
Go hence without him; I do not choose;
He is the scourge of all the poets drear,
And from Parnassus, at the point of wit,
Will chase the miscreants we expect and fear!
My lord, I said, his pace is most unfit,
He'll be a century upon the route!
Quoth Mercury: It matters not a whit;
For be the poet gentleman to boot,
Upon a dappled cloud, and through the air,
He shall be borne, his courtly taste to suit![1]

In the delightful prose appendix to the same poem, the *Adjunta al Parnaso*, Don Pancracio de Roncesvalles brings to Cervantes' house a letter from the god Apollo, dated the 22nd of July, 1614. In this there is another reference to Quevedo: *If Don Francisco de Quevedo hath not left for Sicily, where they await him, seize him by the hand and tell him he must not fail to visit me in a neighbourly way; for his late sudden departure gave me no time to talk with him.*

Quevedo's worldly circumstances, as the owner of a landed estate, and his rank in the public service under the powerful Duke of Osuna, kept him, happily, free from that necessity of writing for bread which oppressed the fine genius but could not stifle the kind heart of the author of *Don Quixote*. But they did not preserve him from the envy of his other less fortunate brothers of the pen. With Lope de Vega, with whom he could

[1] From Mr. J. Y. Gibson's spirited translation of *El Viage del Parnaso* (1883).

have no rivalry, whom he survived ten years, his relations seem to have been tolerably friendly—that is to say, they exchanged compliments and commendatory sonnets. With Góngora there was too much similarity of humour to be much love. They had various tilts at each other, in which there was too much venom spilt for either to emerge with honour. When Góngora abandoned his early simplicity of style and took to that affected and extravagant way of writing which came to be called after him, *Gongorismo*, which corresponded to the disease called *Euphuism* in England and *Marinism* in Italy—Quevedo took up his lance against the intruder and in defence of the language, writing a pamphlet, *La Culta Latiniparla*, in which, under the guise of a catechism for the instruction of ladies of culture in the new way of speech, he quizzes his rival and the new invention very happily. A French critic and student of Spanish letters, M. Germond de Lavigne, in his account of Quevedo, has shown himself so far lost to the sense of humour as to call this piece *un discours critique litteraire*; which is as though we should class Swift's *Argument against the Abolition of Christianity* among works of devotion. Quevedo's wit had little effect in checking the depraved fashion of writing; and it is sad to tell that he himself, in his later years, was infected with the barbarous taste, and Gongorized like the rest. Góngora bitterly resented the attack upon his style, and there passed between the two much dyslogistic verse in the shape of epigram and sonnet. Góngora relieves his feelings by a poem in which he charges his critic with being no great scholar, and with *wandering slow with heavy pace*—one who *sleeps in Spanish and dreams in Greek*—insinuating that he is unsound in his religion. In another sonnet Góngora sneers at his critic's learning, his limping gait, and his blindness, laughs at his red cross of Santiago, and his adventures, calling him *borracho* (drunkard), *pedante gofo* (stupid pedant), *muy crítico y muy lego*, &c. Quevedo retorted with equal spirit and good taste, reflecting on his rival's origin, and hinting that he was no better Catholic than he should be:—

He de untarte mis versos con tocino
Porque no me los roas, Gongorilla.
(I have to anoint my verses with bacon fat
That you may not gnaw them, Gongorilla.)

The point of which jest, heightened by the contemptuous diminutive, lies in the hint that Góngora, then a priest in orders, was no *old Christian*, but either Jew or Morisco. Another enemy of Quevedo was Perez de Montalvan, a writer of plays—the favourite disciple, parasite, and bully of Lope de Vega—whom our satirist was fond of assailing in verse and prose for his dogmatism, his arrogance and his *inscrutable ignorance*. Montalvan took his revenge in a volume entitled *El Tribunal de la Justa Venganza*, written under an assumed name, in which Quevedo's satirical works are tried and condemned for their offences against religion and morality.

Among the works of Quevedo, that which, perhaps, is most characteristic of his genius, and most valuable as a picture of contemporary life and manners, is *Don Pablo de Segovia*, here presented in an English dress, and, as we venture to believe, in a most appropriate and harmonious setting, through the art of M. Vierge. *Don Pablo de Segovia*, otherwise known as *El Gran Tacaño* (*The Great Sharper*), is a prime sample of that species of romance which was native of the soil of Spain—there first engendered at least, and flourishing nowhere else in the same vigour and luxuriance—the *picaresque* novel. The *picaro*—from *picar*, to peck, to nibble at—if he was not a special product of Spain, throve there in the sixteenth century as he did nowhere else in the nations. He was not necessarily a rogue, but always a vagabond. He was one who was at odds with the world—a remnant left over in the making of society—a survival of the age gone by. Of his order were all the broken men of the time—a time in which there was much breaking of men—those who lived by their wits on the witless, the mumpers and beggars, strolling quacks, sham pilgrims, charm-sellers, discharged or runaway soldiers, thieves by profession and knaves by necessity, gypsies, bullies and bravoes, jail-birds, roughs, prisoners, and the baser sort of parasites—the excrement of life, the scum and draff of society. In this kind of material, admirable stuff for the humorist and the painter, Spain was especially rich in the sixteenth century. A capital sample of the accomplished *picaro* is Ginés de Pasamonte, the galley-slave freed by *Don Quixote*, who robbed *Sancho* of his ass, and afterwards appeared as *Master Peter*, the puppet-showman. He is

the typical rogue, whose model in youth, in manhood, and in age is to be found on the canvas of Velasquez and of Murillo. He is a stock figure in the national drama. He must have been a familiar sight to the Spaniards of that age, standing at every street corner, every convent door. He was as common as the poor poet in the market-place. The favourite haunts of the *picaresque* gentry, the Bohemian and the Alsatian, are they not enumerated by the roguish inn-keeper in *Don Quixote*, himself one of the craft, who plays so deftly upon the knight and his humour?—*the Fish-Market of Malaga, the Islets of Riarán, the Compass of Seville, the Aqueduct-Square of Segovia, the Olive Grove of Valencia, the Suburbs of Granada, the Strand of San Lucar, the Clot-Fountain of Cordova, the Pot-Houses of Toledo.* [1]

The causes of this rank growth of the *picaresque* element in Spain are to be sought in the national history. The long series of exhausting wars in the Netherlands and in Italy; the discovery and development of America; the monstrous multiplication of monks, priests, and religious houses during the reigns of Philip and of his successor—these three, the chief causes of Spain's decadence, may be taken to account for the poverty, and the vice, and the bitterness of the struggle for existence, of which the *picaresque* order, in its extraordinary luxuriance, was the outgrowth. The cutpurses, the beggars, the professional rogues and sharpers, were but the product of the unwholesome working of the organs of life—the remainder ruffianry of that period of diseased energy. The internal corruption, of which they were the signs, was the consequence of the fever which shook the frame and the fury which stirred the blood of Spain during all that period of seeming grandeur but of real disease. The *picaro* was the adventurer who had missed his chance in the general scramble, who did not or could not go to Flanders or to America, or who, having been, had returned empty. He was the *conquistador* out of date—the gold-seeker run to seed. How near he was to the failures of the Church—the vagabond friar, the religious mendicant—is clearly seen from this story of *Paul the Sharper*, as well as from the other tales of the class. The peace of 1609, which secured the independence of Holland and put an end to the long

[1] *Don Quixote*, Part i., chap. iii.

war in the Low Countries, only aggravated the evil condition of Spain, by filling the country with a swarm of needy adventurers and disabled and discharged soldiers, for whom the State made no provision. How fruitful a source of demoralization and misery they were we may learn from all the literature of the period, from *Don Quixote* downwards. As for America, the reaction of the tide which brought wealth and new life to Spain had set in even before the middle of the sixteenth century. The flood which carried all the men of enterprise and independent spirit to Peru or to Mexico had left Spain drained of her best life-blood. The sudden influx of gold tended to sharpen the distinction between rich and poor—to make it more difficult for the poor to live, while spoiling them for honesty. The old Castilian simplicity of life was destroyed, and the antique honour, the legacy left by the heroic age which closed with the fall of Granada, corrupted. The new rich introduced luxuries and vices which till then had been alien to the Spanish character. The fortunate adventurers who came back from the New World were as great a terror to public morals through their extravagance and their recklessness, as the unsuccessful through their destitution and despair. The national inclination to the sins of pride, idleness, and boastfulness—how could it happen but that it should be enormously fostered and heightened by the easy conquests in America, following upon the shrinking of the martial power and the prodigious swelling of the ecclesiastical? With nearly ten thousand monasteries and nunneries, and more than thirty thousand monks, of the two orders, Franciscan and Dominican, alone—is it a wonder that the Spain of Philip III. should be hastening to decay? The *picaro* was the fungus which grew out of this mass of corruption. To these running sores was added the expulsion of the Moriscoes under Philip III.—an act of cruelty equally base, barbarous, and stupid, of which the direct consequences were an increase in the cost of life, the stagnation of trade, and the decline of industry, commerce, and agriculture. The blow which reduced the forces of national industry by nearly a million of honest, hardy, thrifty, and skilful workmen, could not but lead to a great increase of poverty, of vice, and of disorder. On this waste, and out of this rottenness, fattened and throve exceedingly the rank weed *picaro*.

The *gusto picaresco*, of which *Don Pablo de Segovia* is the purest expression, arose in Spain upon the decay of the so-called romance of chivalry. Indeed, the first book in that kind, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, was published when the chivalric romance was in full blast, fifty years before *Don Quixote* was written; nor is there any evidence to show that the author was actuated by a spite against the prevailing fashion. On the contrary, if the author was, as I presume he was, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, we know that he was a fond admirer of *Amadis*, taking only that book with him and *Celestina* — that curious tragi-comedy, which was, in some sense, a forerunner of the *picaresque* novel — when despatched to the Eternal City as ambassador of Charles V. There was a close connection between the romantical books of the later period and the earliest of the *picaresque* stories. The *picaro*, in fact, is the direct descendant and the legitimate child of the debased knight-errant. The public were beginning to get weary of the endless histories of the knights-adventurers—all equally puissant and valorous—and longed for common food. It was not the adventurers, however, of which people were sick, but of the dull and stupid books which pretended to tell of their exploits. Whatever chivalry there was in Spain had died out before the blighting influence of the Second Philip—that antithesis incarnate of all romance. The taste for low life was a natural and to a great extent a healthy reaction from the unwholesome diet, miscalled romance and of chivalry, on which the people had fed. The successor of the knight-errant, the *picaro*, was a good deal like the last of the line preceding, with much the same features. He was more picturesque than the knight-errant, and no greater rogue. *Little Lazarus* and his kin, *Paul the Sharper*, *Justina*, *Rinconete*, and *Cortadillo*, spoke at least the language of the people. It was a return to nature—the triumph of the real over the romantic—a veritable revolution, which doubtless led the way to a healthier taste and a higher art.

The revolt against the old style was headed by the book which still stands at the head of *picaresque* literature, *Lazarillo de Tormes*—the work, according to the best tradition and authority, of the famous Castilian statesman, diplomatist, and writer, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza.

I write this with full cognizance of the attempt recently made by M. Morel-Fatio, in the *Revue de Deux Mondes*, to deprive Mendoza of that honour. It is contended by M. Morel-Fatio that there is no direct evidence of Mendoza's being the author of *Lazarillo;* that he never claimed it as his writing; that it was only attributed to him fifty years after his death; and that an equal if not superior claim is that of Father Juan de Ortega, general of the order of Hieronymite monks, to whom the book is ascribed by a monk of his fraternity, in a work published in 1605. The arguments by which M. Morel-Fatio maintains his theory seem to me to be wholly insufficient against Mendoza's claim, and extravagantly wild and weak in favour of Ortega's. It is true that Mendoza never declared himself to be the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes.* There was ample reason why he should not. The book was first published in 1554; and immediately on its appearance was suppressed by order of the Inquisition, and put in the *Index Expurgatorius.* But in 1554 Mendoza was at the very climax of his public reputation, having just returned from Italy with great credit as Charles V.'s ambassador to the Pope. It was scarcely a time which he would choose to put his name to a book which had been declared offensive to faith and morals, in which the abuses of the Church were boldly attacked, and even its ceremonies ridiculed. The next year Philip II. came to the throne, when Mendoza found himself in disgrace, and had to retire to his estates. It was a period still less favourable for his appearing as the author of a loose and ribald book called *Lazarillo de Tormes.*

Again, it is contended that Mendoza, a grave and haughty noble, of the proudest family in Spain, who aspired to high place and power at Court, could hardly have written such a story, dealing with low life and vulgar people. But Mendoza was a man of varied accomplishments, of wide knowledge of life, unencumbered with the prejudices of caste and of singular literary gifts, who might have been one of the great authors of Spain had he not been content to be a great statesman. He had been trained for the Church, had been a student at Salamanca, and had served in the Spanish armies in Italy. He was thus thoroughly well equipped with all that was required to qualify him for loose literature.

Moreover, as one who had been intended for the priesthood—a calling which he abandoned for soldiership—he could be no friend to the cloth, and was precisely the man to ridicule, as he has done, the abuses of the Church and the vices of the priests, even to caricature the *bulero* and the hawker of indulgences. Lastly, there is this further circumstance in support of his claim that he was known to be a lover of popular literature, and had shown precisely the same literary talent, humour, and idiomatic grace which are characteristic of *Lazarillo*, in some acknowledged letters, still extant, in which he satirizes, with ample knowledge of their tricks and way of life, the *catariberas*—the needy adventurers and greedy office-seekers of the period. As to Ortega, whose claim, first put forth only as a piece of rumour—and, in such a case, of scandal—in 1605, and never since by any Spanish authority repeated—is it necessary to dwell on the absurdity of an ecclesiastic of his eminence writing a book against the vices of his own caste and assailing his own order—a book dealing with the lives of rogues and vagabonds—which had to be suppressed by the Church as soon as it appeared? Nor has M. Morel-Fatio been able to produce any scrap of Ortega's writing, of character and style like *Lazarillo*. Priests and monks have, indeed, in that age and in every other, produced much loose literature. It was a priest who wrote *La Picara Justina*, the dirtiest of its class. It was a Dominican monk who is charged with the authorship of the false Second Part of *Don Quixote*. Without occupying any more of my space on this subject, it is enough to repeat that the weight of testimony since the days of Nicolas Antonio, the learned and accurate author of the *Bibliotheca Hispana Nova*, to the present time, is in favour of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza as the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

Of the *picaresque* stories, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, though imperfect and without a proper conclusion, must still be regarded as the first in merit as it was the first in time. It has been the model for all its numerous successors, just as the *Amadis of Gaul* of the previous fashion had been the model for the romances of chivalry. For gaiety of humour, the easy and natural tone of life and simplicity of colouring, it has been held in great favour ever since its appearance; by no one relished more than

by the author of *Don Quixote*. The next in date was *Guzman de Alfarache*, by Mateo Aleman, a native of Seville, of which the first part was published in 1599. This, though almost as popular as its predecessor, and even more frequently reprinted and translated, has been much over-praised. It is, in truth, a somewhat arid and tedious performance, written in a poor style. The hero is less interesting than his class, for he is not only a rogue but a hypocrite, who pretends to deceive himself as much as he deceives others, and aspires to be good and pious, which makes him less picturesque and more immoral than if he were a *picaro* proper and true. Next to follow in that line was the *Picara Justina*, published in 1605, the work of a Dominican whose real name was Andrés Perez. For the better prevention of scandal, Father Perez, being likewise the author of divers devotional books, assumed the name of Lopez de Ubeda. Justina has nothing to recommend her, not even her viciousness. She is false, affected, and silly, and worthy to end, as she does, by becoming the wife of Guzman de Alfarache. The book is perhaps the worst of its class, in art as in ethics, being made additionally nauseous by the moral warnings and tags of virtuous sentiment with which the chapters conclude. Perhaps anterior to both *Guzman de Alfarache* and *Picara Justina*, though not published till 1613, were Cervantes' two sketches of *picaresque* life, *Rinconete y Cortadillo* and *Los Perros de Mahudes*, the scene of which is laid in the Triana, the suburb of Seville, then, as now, the favourite home and head-quarters of the *picaresque* gentry. There is internal evidence to show that both these stories, which are clearly drawn from real life and actual experience, were written before the death of Philip II., in 1598. Cervantes resided at Seville with his family between 1588 and 1598, and there is little doubt that the picture he draws of Seville low life is of this period. *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, in all the qualities of the higher art, must be placed at the head of this species of literature. Although only a sketch, it is brimful of humour, wit, and life, drawn with the same delicate and masterly hand which has given us *Don Quixote*. What is admirable in the picture is the skill with which a repulsive subject is treated, so that, while preserving all its truth, it is redeemed from grossness. There is not a word which is offensive to

taste; yet the thieves, the bullies, the *bona robas*, and the other delightful but most improper people, move and breathe and talk as *full of life as if they lived indeed.* In others of his books, Cervantes has shown his wide and profound knowledge—doubtless born of actual experience—of this lower order of humanity, as in his *Rufian Dichoso*, the *Fortunate Bully*, and in some of his plays and interludes.

It is needless to follow in detail the history of the later experiments in the *gusto picaresco.* As we approach later times the stories become duller and more respectable. The *Marcos de Obregon* of Vicente Espinel appeared in 1618. It is a story of adventure abroad rather than of low life at home, not wanting in spirit, and with a more regular construction than most stories of this class, from which Le Sage has stolen very largely and boldly in his *Gil Blas*, even appropriating the name of the hero, and giving it to one of his characters. In 1624 came another of the *picaresque* brood, called *Alonso, Mozo de Muchos Amos* (*Alonso, Servant of Many Masters*), by one Yanez y Rivera, which deals with the humours of domestic service. We need not occupy ourselves with the long string of lesser works of this character, which are rather romances of real life than *picaresque* tales—the *Niña de los Embustes* (the *Child of Tricks*) and the *Garduña de Sevilla* (the *She-Marten of Seville*) of Solorzano; the *Diablo Cojuelo* (the *Lame Devil*) of Guevara, and *Estevanillo Gonzalez*, attributed to the same author, which is the pretended autobiography of a buffoon, better known by Le Sage's French version than in the original. Last of all, we come to that which by some is reckoned to be the *picaresque* novel *par excellence*—the well-known work of Le Sage himself, in collaboration with many others, called *Gil Blas.* This, with all its merits, is no *picaresque* novel at all, except in an oblique sense as being the work of a *picaroon*—a clever theft by an adept in literary conveyance, the very Autolycus of authors. While the matter is Spanish, the form and, oddly enough, a great deal of the spirit, is French. I will not go into the question of what were the sources from which Le Sage drew his story. That very Spanish and yet curiously French work (*Spanish bricks in French mortar*) is a wonderful piece of literary craft, showing a genius in the art of

stealing which is equal to that of original composition, and even more rare. But *Gil Blas*, when all is said, is not a true *picaroon*, of the breed of *Lazarillo* and *Rinconete*. He is an impostor, but in another than the true sense. He is a fortune-hunter, who looks closely to the main chance, who descends to be respectable, who aims at a social position, like *Jerome Paturot*. He marries twice, and lives comfortably in a fine house—a prosperous gentleman, after bidding hope and fortune farewell. He is no more a *picaro* than *Ruy Blas* is a Spaniard or Djalma an Indian prince.

Of the *picaresque* novel, which is the special product of Spain—never successfully acclimatized in any other country, and as entirely Spanish as the *olla* or the *gazpacho*—one of the purest specimens is *Don Pablo de Segovia* (*Paul the Sharper*), *exemplo de Vagamundos y espejo de Tacaños —pattern of vagabonds and mirror of rogues*. The book is generally known as *El Buscon*, or *El Gran Tacaño*. The latter title, which is not Quevedo's, was made the leading designation of the book after the author's death, and is still that by which the book is most popular in Spain. *Buscon* is from *buscar*, to seek, and means a pursuer of fortune, a searcher after the means of life, a *cadger*. *Tacaño* is ingeniously derived by old Covarrubias, in the earliest Spanish dictionary, from the Greek κακός, being a corruption of *cacaño;* or from the Hebrew *tachach*, which is said to mean fraud and deceit. *Don Pablo*, however his titles may be derived, is generally admitted to be the perfect type of an adventurer of the *picaresque* school. The book of his exploits, though left, like so many Spanish books, unfinished, is described by Quevedo's best critic as *of all his writings the freest from affectation, the richest in lively and natural humours, the brightest, simplest, and most perspicuous; in which he comes nearest to the amenity, artlessness, and delightful and delicate style of Don Quixote*. These praises are not undeserved, although the knight of industry, in his quest of adventures, is very far from being of kin to the warrior of chivalry, the gentle and perfect knight of La Mancha. Disfigured as it is by all Quevedo's faults of style and manner, *Don Pablo* deserves to be rescued from the fate to which its faults of language, rather than its defects of taste or its failure in the moral part, have

hitherto consigned it, at least in England. As a picture of low, vagabond life, it necessarily deals with vice, but it cannot be said that the vice is rendered attractive. All the characters are bad, in the sense that they all belong to the class who have failed to achieve a decent life. The company is not select in which we move, but it can hardly be said that there is contamination in it any more than we get from looking at Hogarth's *Gin Lane*, or the *Borrachos* of Velasquez. From beginning to end *Don Pablo's* career is one of undisguised trickery, dissimulation, and lying. All his companions are thieves, or impostors, or rogues, patent or undetected. The scenes are laid almost entirely in the lowest places—in the slums of Segovia, of Madrid, and of Seville, mostly in prison or in some refuge from the law. The manners of the people, men and women, are as repulsive as their morals; and they talk (which is not unusual) after their natures. When we concede all this we admit the worst which can be said of Quevedo's work, and impute nothing against the author, either as artist or moralist. It is difficult to imagine any virtue of a texture so frail as to be injured by the reading of *Paul the Sharper*. There is no vice in the book, even though it deals exclusively with vicious people. There is nothing hurtful in the character of the complete rogue, nor is he painted in any but his natural colours, as a mean, sordid vagabond, who does or says nothing whatever to gild his trade or to embellish his calling. This is the crowning merit of Quevedo's book, among those of its class, that there are no shabby tricks played upon the reader, such as other writers of even higher pretensions are guilty of—no attempt to pass off a rogue as though he were a hero in distress—a creature deserving of sympathy, who is only treating the world as the world treated him—a victim of fortune, whose ill-usage by society justifies his attitude towards the social system. There is no sentiment expended over *Paul of Segovia*. There is no snivelling over his low condition, or railing at his unhappy lot. He is not conscious of his degradation. He is a thief, the son of a thief, with a perfect knowledge of what his mother is; but he makes no secret of his calling, nor indulges in excuses for himself or his family. The other heroes of the *picaresque* novel make some faint pretence to decent behaviour, but *Paul* never deviates into respectability.

He is *picaro* to the fingers' ends—in either sense. Through all his changes of character and of costume he is still rogue, entire and perfect, without any sprouts of honesty or repinings after a better life. The *naïveté* with which he tells of his exploits, without boasting and without shame, is of the highest art—true to nature, nor offensive to morality. Whether he is cheating a jailer or bilking a landlady, dodging the *alguacil* or bamboozling the old poet, or befooling the nun, or tricking the bully, he is always true to himself, without affectation or conceit of being other than he is. There are no asides, where either the hero or the author (as the bad modern custom is) communes with his conscience, or finds excuses for himself, or draws a moral, or in some way or other imparts to the reader how much superior he (the writer) is to his hero, and how conscious he is of the reader's presence, giving him to understand, in a manner unflattering to his intelligence, how that all that he writes is in joke and not to be taken in bad part. That Quevedo does not do so is his chief point of art in the book, which deserves to be ranked among the best of its class, as a chapter out of the great comedy of human life. The simplicity with which the story is told, without those digressions and interruptions to which the Spanish story-teller is so prone, make it a work almost unique among books of the kind. For once Quevedo has spoken in a language direct and plain, without a riddle or a hidden motive. It is of course a satire, but a satire of the legitimate kind, not upon persons, but upon mankind—against general vice, not against particular sins. The characters of the story, which seems rather to tell itself than to be told, are all such as were the common property of the comic writers of the period, but scarcely anywhere else are they found invested with so much of the breath of life. *Don Pablo* himself, his companions, his fellow-students, the crazy old poet, the villainous jailer, the braggart *espadachins*, the poor *hidalgo*, the strolling players, the beggars, the gay ladies, the jail-birds, bullies, and thieves—every member of that unclean company, with all their unsavoury surroundings, is a real, living personage.

Don Pablo de Segovia was first published in 1626, at Saragossa, and had a great success, several editions being called for before the author's death. There is reason to believe that it was written some years before,

being probably circulated in manuscript among the author's friends before being printed, as was the custom of the time. In 1624 Quevedo had been lately released from the first of his imprisonments at Torre de San Juan Abad, and had partially recovered the favour of the Court. It was a period when the printers were most busy with his works—when satires, political apologues, religious tracts, visions, burlesque and piquant odes, fantasies, and calls to devotion were being poured forth abundantly out of his fruitful brain. Señor Guerra y Orbe believes that *Don Pablo* was written in 1608. That it was composed before 1624 is proved, I think, by the character of the book, which is certainly more juvenile than belongs to a man of forty-six, as well as by a piece of evidence to be found within. In chapter viii., when on the road to Torrejon, *Don Pablo* comes up with a crazy man mounted on a mule, who proves to be a master of the art of fencing, with several extravagant projects in his brain for the good of the kingdom. Among these he has two schemes to propose to the king for the reduction of Ostend. Now the great siege of Ostend, which is doubtless the one referred to, was that which ended, after three years' fighting in which an extraordinary number were slain on both sides, in September, 1604. It is a reasonable conjecture, therefore, that *Don Pablo*, at least as far as chapter viii., was written prior to this date. The chapters in which the students' adventures at Alcalá are described seem to me also to bear internal evidence of having been written when the impression of university life was still fresh upon the author. This theory of the date of *Don Pablo* makes the author a young man of twenty-three when the book was composed; and the book itself the third, in order of time, of the *picaresque* romances, following closely after *Guzman de Alfarache*.

Don Pablo de Segovia has been always popular in its native country, and has been frequently translated into other languages. Señor Guerra y Orbe notes more than forty editions of the original in Spain and in the Spanish dominions. An Italian translation, by Juan Pedro Franco, appeared in 1634 at Venice. A French version, by Geneste, was included among the burlesque works of Quevedo, translated into that language in 1641. Other early French versions are those of Lyons and of Brussels.

In 1842 M. Germond de Lavigne brought out his translation of *Don Pablo* which is spirited and readable, but a good deal changed from the original. Portions of other works by Quevedo are inserted in the text, a prologue borrowed from the *Hora de Todos*, and a conclusion added from out of the manufactory of M. Lavigne himself. In M. Lavigne's latest edition of 1882 appeared the first of M. Vierge's admirably spirited and characteristic sketches.

Don Pablo was early introduced into the English tongue, though it is perhaps the least known of Quevedo's works. The *Visions*, translated by the indefatigable Sir Roger L'Estrange, first appeared in 1688, and went through many editions in that and the succeeding century. The English version has the merit, which belongs to all L'Estrange's work, of being in good, sound, and vigorous language, lively and not inelegant, but it is far from faithful to the original, the translator taking great liberties with his author in the attempt to bring him up to the level of the *humour of the times*. The *Visions* were much read and often quoted by English writers of the last century. The *Buscon*, shorn of much of his stature, was Englished by *a person of quality* so early as 1657, with a dedication to a lady. It was still further reduced in 1683, both in size and art, though most of the grossness was left untouched. The well-known Captain John Stevens, who translated Mariana's *History* and professed (without warrant) to improve and correct Shelton's *Don Quixote* (which he did not do to any appreciable extent), also took Quevedo in hand, translating *Don Pablo*, among other *comical pieces*, in 1707. A new translation was given to the world in 1734 by Don Pedro Pineda, a teacher of the Spanish language, then resident in London. Pineda it was who revised the Spanish text of the splendid edition of *Don Quixote*, published at the charge of Lord Carteret in 1734, four handsome quarto volumes—the first in which print and paper did full justice to Cervantes' masterpiece. Though a person of little humour, who fell a victim to Cervantes' irony in the matter of the poet Lofraso and his *Fortuna de Amor*, Pineda was a competent Spanish scholar, at least for that age. How far his English was his own we have no means of knowing, but his *perfect knowledge of the language of the original*

recommended him to the editors of the edition of *Quevedo's Works*, published at Edinburgh in 1798, as a person fit to revise and correct the version of Mr. Stevens. That version, though not satisfactory in all respects, is still the best we have in English. It is almost too faithful to the original in respect that it retains many expressions, phrases, and words, of the kind in which Quevedo loved to indulge, which, however appropriate in the mouths of the speakers in a thieves' den or a convict prison, are scarcely delicate enough for the taste of the modern English public, or necessary to bring out the full humour of the story.

The text of the English translation of 1798, corrected and revised, is that which has been followed in the present publication, of which the immediate object is less to rescue Quevedo's story from oblivion than to bring to the notice of the public the singular merit of his countryman, M. Vierge (Daniel Urrabieta), as an artist in black and white. H. E. WATTS.

Don Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas

The Life History of the Sharper

Named Don Pablos, Paragon of Tramps and Exemplar of Swindlers

BOOK ONE

1

In Which He Says Who He Is and from Where

I am, sir, from Segovia.[1] My father's name was Clemente Pablo, born in the same town, God rest his soul. He was, as everyone says, a barber by trade, though he was so high-minded that the title humiliated him, so he would call himself a shearer of cheeks and a tailor of beards.[2] They say he came from good stock; considering how much he used to drink, I can believe it.

He was married to Aldonza de San Pedro, daughter of Diego de San Juan and granddaughter of Andrés de San Cristóbal. The townspeople suspected she was not an Old Christian (even when they saw her gray hair and ragged clothes), though she wielded her forbears' saintly names and surnames to prove that she was a descendant of Heaven. She was a very pleasant sight, and was so famous in her lifetime that every songster in Spain did things on her.[3]

She suffered greatly as a newlywed, and even afterwards, for scandalmongers began whispering that my father would use the two of

1. One of the early versions of the novel changes the unnamed addressee from "Señor" (Sir) to "Señora" (Madam), here and throughout the book.

2. Barber, shearer, and tailor (*barbero, tundidor, sastre*) were slang terms for "thief." Pablos' father was both a barber and a thief.

3. The crude double entendre is Quevedo's. Old Christians were those with no Jewish or Moorish "blood." However, Aldonza and her family are identified by their surnames as New Christians, descendants of Jews forced to convert to Catholicism, who were often given the names of Catholic saints as surnames. People in this period frequently changed surnames from one generation to the next, especially in the lower social ranks.

clubs to take the ace of diamonds.[4] The court found that whenever he shaved a man's beard, while he was wetting the beard and lifting the man's face to wash it, my seven-year-old brother would coolly remove the goods from the man's pockets. The little angel died from a few lashes they gave him in jail. This really saddened my father, because my brother was the sort of kid who stole everyone's heart.

For these and other silly things they threw my father in jail, though as they have told me, he was so highly honored that he had two hundred stripes when he got out, though no one called him an officer. They say the ladies used to stand at their balcony windows to watch him because my father always looked good, whether on foot or on horseback.[5] I do not say this to boast, for everyone knows how much I dislike doing that.

My mother, though, suffered no disasters. An old woman who helped raise me once praised her, saying she was so pleasant that she bewitched everyone who had dealings with her. Only, the old woman supposedly added something or other about a he-goat, and flying, on account of which they nearly gave my mother feathers so she could fly in public.[6]

It was commonly said that she rebuilt virgins, resurrected hair by covering up gray locks, impregnated legs with thick leggings to make them look strong. Nobody ever asked her to let her hair down, but she herself let down the hair of bald women, for she made wigs; she resettled jaws with teeth. In sum, she lived from decorating men and was in the body-repair business. Some called her a uniter of desires; others, a bonesetter of dislocated affections; others, a joiner. One called her a pipefitter for members; another, a knitter of flesh. Not to put too

4. That is, he was a pickpocket, using two fingers to pinch a man's purse. Also, the two of clubs is the lowest-ranking card in the Spanish card deck, while the ace of gold coins (equivalent to the ace of diamonds) is the highest; only by cheating can you take an ace with a two.

5. "On horseback" is meant ironically. Convicted prisoners were publicly shamed by being led to jail on donkeyback, not horseback; that is the joke. The prisoner's hands were bound and his back was exposed for whipping. The "two hundred stripes" are the lashes he was given, a standard number for a serious crime. Joking references to whipped backs and riding "horses" in public abound throughout the novel.

6. The implication is that she was a witch. The devil supposedly appeared at witches' secret rituals in the form of a male goat (*cabrón*) and gave his followers the ability to fly. Tarring and feathering was one punishment for those accused of witchcraft.

fine a point on it: a procuress. She was the deuce to some, a real ace for others, and always flush with other men's cash.[7] Seeing how jolly she looked when she heard everyone say these things only attracted their affections even more. I will not dwell on her long list of penances. She surrounded her whole bedroom—which only she entered, though when I was little I sometimes came in, too—with skulls, which she said she kept for reminding her of death. Others reproached her, however, and claimed she used them for arranging the desires of life.[8] Her bed was suspended from hangmen's nooses, and she would say to me, "Guess what? With these as reminders, I tell the men I love best that if they don't want to be seen with nooses round their necks, they should grow their beards long enough to conceal them. That way, they'll be able to hide all signs of what they've done."

My parents had tremendous arguments over whose trade I should follow, my father's or my mother's. But even as a small child I dreamed of being a gentleman, so I never devoted myself to either. My father would say, "Son, this business of being a thief is no mechanical art; it's liberal"—and, after a pause and a sigh, he would continue—"with the hands. If you don't steal in this world, you can't live. Why else do you think the constables and judges detest us so much? Sometimes they banish us, sometimes they flog us, sometimes they surprise us with a nice new necktie even though it isn't our birthday. I can't talk about it without crying"; and the good old fellow would weep like a small child to recall the times they had beaten him around the ribs, "because they don't want to have any thieves around but themselves and their underlings. Having a sharp mind saves us from all that, though. As a lad, I always hung out around churches, and it sure wasn't because I'm such a good Christian.[9] Many a time I'd have been ridden on the donkey if I'd sung on the colt.[10] I never confessed, except when the Holy Mother Church demanded it. I've been jailed for aggressive highway

7. The wordplay draws on the card game *primera* or *quinolas*, a precursor of poker known as *primero* in seventeenth-century England. Where the translation has "deuce," the Spanish calls Pablos' mother a *tercera*, "third," meaning a winning hand (three of a kind) in the game, but in social situations meaning a go-between or procuress.

8. Human bones and nooses were used in the more unsavory forms of love magic.

9. Churches were places of asylum for people fleeing the law.

10. "Colt" (*potro*) is the Spanish term for the torture device known in English as "the rack." Quevedo pairs it here with the donkey used to parade convicted prisoners.

begging, and I've been two shakes from having my throat dressed up with a special necktie that would have closed out all my affairs for sixteen maravedís: ten for rope and six for hemp.[11] And so, with this trade of mine, I've supported your mother as honorably as I've been able."

"What do you mean, you supported me?" she would say in a tremendous rage, sad that I would not devote myself to witchcraft. "I've supported you! I've sprung you from jail with my handiwork, and I've fed you in jail with my money. If you didn't confess, was it because of your own spirit or because of the brews I gave you? Thanks to my potions! And if I wasn't afraid they'd hear me in the street, I'd tell about the time I went down the chimney and took you out through the roof."

She would have kept going, she was so wound up, if she had not been waving her arms so forcefully that she broke a rosary of deadmen's teeth she wore. I made peace between them by saying I was resolved to learn virtue and to forge ahead with my good way of thinking, so they should send me to school, since you cannot do anything without knowing how to read and write. They liked what I had to say, though they grumbled to each other about it for a while. My mother went back to restringing the teeth, and my father went out to give somebody a shave, as he put it. I do not know if he was talking about a beard or a purse. Usually, both. I remained alone, giving thanks to God for making me the son of such clever and caring parents.

2

How I Went to School and What Happened to Me There

Next day the primer had been bought and the schoolteacher spoken to. I went, sir, to the school. The teacher was quite happy to accept me, saying I had the face of a smart fellow with good judgment. So as not to make him seem a liar I worked hard at my lessons that morning. The teacher used to have me sit next to him; most days I won the paddle

11. Hemp rope was used for judicial hangings.

for getting there first.[12] And I used to be the last to leave, because I was running errands for "the lady," as we called the teacher's wife. Through such courtesies I kept them obliged to me. They favored me excessively, which made the other boys jealous. Out of all of them, I cozied up to the sons of gentlemen, particularly to a son of Don Alonso Coronel de Zúñiga, who went halfsies with me. On holidays I would go home with him, and every day I would keep him company. The other boys, whether because I did not talk to them or because they thought my sense of pride was too much, went around all the time giving me nicknames based on my father's trade. Some called me Mr. Razor, others called me Mr. Bloodletter. One dissimulated his envy with the excuse that he disliked me because my mother had sucked his two little sisters' blood at night.[13] Another said my father had been brought to his house to sweep it clean of mice, which was a way of calling him a cat burglar. Others said "Scat!" when I walked by; others, "meow." One would say, "I hurled two eggplants at your mother when she was bishop."[14]

In the end, for all that they went around picking my nits, they never abandoned me, glory be to God. And though I felt humiliated, I pretended nothing was wrong. I put up with it all until one day when a boy dared to call me, out loud, a son of a whore and witch. Since he said this so clearly (if he had only mumbled a little, I would not have let it bother me), I picked up a rock and broke his crown. I ran home to my mother to hide, and I told her the whole story, to which she said, "You did the right thing and showed them who you are. The only thing you did wrong was not asking him who had told him."

When I heard this, since I was always high-minded, I turned to look at her and begged her to tell me flat-out whether I could have truthfully called him a liar. I wanted her to tell me whether I had been conceived buffet-style by many men or whether I was my father's son.

She laughed and said, "Ah, dang! That's what you have to say? You won't be anyone's fool: you've got wit. You did right to break his head, because such things shouldn't be said out loud, even if they are true."

12. The first schoolboy to arrive won the right to punish the other boys by paddling their hands with a leather rod if they misbehaved (Arellano 1997: 64).

13. Witches supposedly turned into batlike, blood-sucking creatures at night.

14. Implying that she wore a "mitre," slang for the tall paper dunce cap used to publicly shame convicted sorcerers. Shamed convicts were placed in stocks, where crowds pelted them with rotten vegetables.

Hearing this left me numb. I made up my mind to grab as much as I could in a few days and leave my parents' house—that was the power shame had over me. I pretended nothing was wrong. My father went, bandaged the boy, made peace with him, and brought me back to school. The teacher confronted me angrily, but after he heard what the fight was about he got over his rage, figuring that I had been in the right.

Throughout it all, Don Alonso de Zúñiga's son, whose name was Don Diego, never stopped visiting me. He naturally liked me a lot, for I used to trade my spinning tops for his if I had a better one. I would share my lunch with him, not asking for any of his in return, and I would buy prints for him, teach him how to wrestle, play bullfighter with him, and always keep him entertained. So the little gentleman's parents, seeing how much he liked being with me, would beg my parents to let me eat dinner with him almost every day, and supper, too, and even sleep over most days.

One of the first school days after Christmas, it so happened that a man named Poncho de Aguirre, widely rumored to be "confessed," was walking down the street.[15] Don Dieguito told me, "Hey, go call him Pontius Pilate and run away." To make my friend happy, I called the man Pontius Pilate. This humiliated him so deeply that he chased me with a dagger drawn to kill me, so I had to duck into my teacher's house, screaming. The man ran in after me, and my teacher protected me from getting killed, promising the man he would punish me. So right away—even though "the lady" begged him to forgive me, moved by how much I helped her—he ordered me to drop my pants, and as he whipped me he asked with every blow of the lash, "Will you ever say 'Pontius Pilate' again?"

I answered, "No, sir," giving the same answer twenty times, once for each lash he dealt me. After this punishment, I was so scared to say "Pontius Pilate" again that when the teacher asked me the next day to say prayers for the other boys, as I usually did, I got to the Credo—please observe my innocent naughtiness—and at the point where it says "suffered under Pontius Pilate," I remembered that I was never supposed to say Pilate, so I said, "suffered under Poncho de Aguirre." The teacher laughed so hard when he heard my simplicity and saw how afraid I was of him that he hugged me and signed a pardon

15. *Confeso* was a euphemism for "New Christian," a person with known Jewish ancestry. So-called New Christians were under constant suspicion of "judaizing," continuing after their Christian baptism to follow Jewish laws such as refusing to eat pork, a religious crime severely prosecuted by the Inquisition.

slip, good for letting me off free the next two times I deserved to be whipped. That made me very happy.

The week of Carnival arrived (skipping ahead, not to bore you), and the teacher came up with a plan to keep his boys entertained by choosing a King of the Roosters. The dozen of us that he picked out drew straws, and the honor fell to me. I let my parents know they should get me a gala costume.

The day arrived, and out I rode on a rickety withered horse that curtseyed constantly as it walked, more from being lame than out of politeness. It had haunches like a tailless monkey's, a neck like a camel's or longer, and only one eye, and egg-white-cloudy at that. You could tell it had done a lot of penance and fasting and that the man in charge of it had pulled every trick in the book to pilfer its rations. So I rode out on it, jerking from side to side like a Pharisee on an Easter float, all the brightly costumed children running after me.

We passed through the plaza—it scares me just to recall it—and as we drew near the market women's vegetable stands (God save us!) my horse grabbed a cabbage from one of them. No one saw or heard when he dispatched it to his innards, where it took a while to arrive, having to tumble down through his whole gullet first. The cabbage woman, brazen as they all are, started shouting. More women ran over, some scullion boys joined them, and everyone sent a shower of humongous carrots, colossal turnips, eggplants, and other vegetables raining down on the poor king. I could see that beet-to-beet warfare was no place for the cavalry, so I tried to dismount, but the horse took such a blow on the snout that it reared back and we both fell into—begging your pardon—an open latrine. You can imagine what that did for me. My boys had already armed themselves with stones and were going after the market women, clobbering two of them. Meanwhile, my tumble into the latrine left me alone privy to the battle's progress. The officer showed up, put cabbage women and market lads alike under arrest, found and confiscated all the arms everyone bore, for some brandished the daggers they usually wore for show while others wielded short swords. He reached me. Finding me unarmed—I had set my blade down in a house to dry, along with my cape and hat—he asked me, as I've said, for my offensive arms. I replied, all besmirched, that unless he meant offensive smells, I had none.

And by the by, I want to confess to you that when they started throwing eggplants, turnips, and so forth at me, I thought they had mistaken me for my mother because of the feathers that I wore in my hat, and that they meant to be pelting her, as they had on

other occasions.[16] So, being young and foolish, I began to say, "Sisters! Even though I'm wearing feathers, I'm not Aldonza de San Pedro, my mother," as if they were unable to tell from my figure and face. My fear was my excuse for being so ignorant, and also the fact these troubles came down on me so abruptly.

But, returning to the constable: he wanted to take me to jail, but I was so slimed in mire he could not find a clean spot to grab me by. Some ran one way, others ran the other, and I came back to my house from the plaza, mortifying every nose I passed along the way. I entered, told my parents what had happened, and they were so humiliated to see how I looked that they wanted to beat me. I blamed the two miles of wrung-out nag they had given me. I did my best to mollify them, but when I saw that this was not enough I left their house and went to see my friend Don Diego. I found him at his house, his head cracked and his parents resolved on that account not to send him back to school. I was there when I got the news that my nag, finding itself in a tight spot, had made a supreme effort to give a couple of kicks, and it was so feeble it broke its haunches and fell down in the mire, just about done for.

Finding myself, then, with the festivities in disarray, the town scandalized, my parents humiliated, my friend skull-cracked, and my horse dead, I made up my mind not to go back to school or to my parent's house, either, but instead to stay on and to serve Don Diego—or rather, to keep him company. This plan truly pleased his parents, since the boy enjoyed my friendship. I wrote home that I would not have to go back to school, even though I had not yet learned how to write well, because my plan was to become a gentleman, which calls for writing poorly. Without any further ado I quit school so as not rack up their expenses, and quit home so as to save them grief. I let them know where I was, how I was doing, and that I would not see them again until they gave me their permission.

16. Another reference to the shaming punishments of being tarred, feathered, and pelted with rotten vegetables.

3

How I Went to a Boarding School as the Servant of Don Diego Coronel

So Don Alonso decided to send his son to a boarding school—first, to wean him from the idle life; second, to spare himself some worry. He learned about a Professor Cabra in Segovia who trained the sons of gentlemen, and he sent his own son to Cabra's school, sending me as well to accompany and serve him.[17]

We fell, on the first Sunday after Lent, into the hands of hunger itself, for the poverty we found there was beyond exaggeration. Cabra was a pea-shooter of a cleric, long of body, short of hand, his head tiny, his hair red. No more need be said to those who know the saying, "stay away from gingerheads, even cats and dogs." His eyes close together, as if peering from a pair of baskets so deep and hollow they would have made a good, dim site for a merchant's stall; his nose half-pug, half-French, for its end had been eaten away (but by fever blisters rather than the French pox, for to catch that he would have had to spend money); beard white with fear of the mouth next to it, which really looked as if it might start gnawing the beard from sheer hunger; several teeth fallen out, no doubt banished for shiftlessness and vagrancy; gullet long as an ostrich's neck, its Adam's apple sticking out as if dire need had driven it to go foraging afar for food; withered arms; each hand a bundle of sticks. Seen from the waist down, he looked like a two-pronged fork or a drafting compass, with a pair of long, skinny legs; his gait, slow as could be. Whenever he got a bit wound up, his bones rattled like Lazarus-clappers.[18] His voice rickety; his beard long for lack of cutting, to save money—he said he found it so repulsive to see the barber's hands near his face that he would prefer to be killed than allow it, so one of us boys used to cut his hair. On sunny days he wore a professor's biretta punctured with a plethora of perforations

17. The teacher's name in Spanish is Licenciado Cabra (literally, Licenciate Goat), another surname indicating possible Jewish ancestry. A "licenciate" is a university graduate with the rough equivalent of a bachelor's degree.

18. "Lazarus-clappers" were wooden rattles or clackers that lepers sounded to warn of their approach and to beg for alms.

and garnished with grease stains, made of something that was once wool, nicely lined with dandruff. His academic robes were, according to some, miraculous, for it was impossible to tell what color they were. Some people, seeing their smoothness, supposed they were made of frog skin. Others said they were magical illusions: up close they looked black; from a distance, bluish. He wore them unbelted, no collar or cuffs. With his long hair and short, squalid robes he looked like Death's own flunky. Each shoe was as big as Goliath's tomb. As for his bedroom, not even a spider there. He drove all the mice away, afraid they might gnaw some crust of bread he had kept hidden. His mattress sat on the floor, and he always slept on one side so as not to wear out the sheets. In sum, he was archpauper and protomiser.[19]

It was into this man's hands, then, that I fell, and in his hands I remained, along with Don Diego. The night we arrived he showed us to our room and gave us a quick speech, which he kept short because he did not even like to spend time. He told us what we had to do, and that was all we did until it was time for dinner.[20] We went. The masters ate first, and we servants waited on them. The dining room was maybe half a bushel in size. Up to five gentlemen could squeeze in at the table. The first thing I did was look around for cats, and when I did not see any I asked an old servant why not. His skinny body marked him as a longtime resident there. His face softened with pity as he said, "How could cats live here? Have you ever heard of a cat that enjoys fasting and penance? I can tell by your plump face that you're new here."

Hearing this, I began to feel dismayed. I grew more frightened when I noticed that all the boys who had spent time at the boarding school were skinny as awls, their faces seemingly daubed with diachylon.[21] Professor Cabra sat down and said grace. The dinner they ate was eternal—no starter, no last course. They brought in wooden bowls of a broth so clear that Narcissus would have run more of a risk by gazing into it than into the pool. I anxiously observed as gaunt fingers dived through the broth, chasing after a lonely orphaned garbanzo that had

19. Quevedo modeled these word inventions on "archpriest" (the leading priest in a region) and "protomartyr" (the first Christian martyr in a country or territory).

20. They arrived at night, so we may assume that what Cabra told them to do was go to sleep. Dinner (*comida*), the largest meal of the day, would have been served at noon the following day.

21. That is, they are pale, taken as a sign of weakness. Diachylon is a white medicinal ointment.

settled to the bottom. With each slurp Cabra would say, "It is so true. There's nothing like the soup pot, no matter what they say. All else is vice and gluttony." That said, he chugged down his bowl, saying, "This is all pure health, and even better for your wits."

"Go choke on your bad wits," I was muttering to myself, when I saw a serving lad—little more than a spirit, and every bit as thin—carrying a plate of flesh that he seemed to have stripped from his own body. A freelancing turnip came attached, and on seeing it the teacher said, "We have turnips? No partridge could beat that! Eat up, everyone, for it cheers me so to see you eating." He served each of them so little mutton that I think it all ended up either caught under their fingernails or stuck between their teeth, excommunicating their innards as accomplices. Cabra looked at them and said, "Eat up! For you're fine lads, and it cheers me to see your good appetites." Just what people yawning with hunger wanted to hear, don't you think? They finished eating and left a few crusts behind, and a bit of skin and some bones on the platter, and the boarding-school master said, "Leave that for the servants, who also must eat. Let us not take it all."

"God curse you and everything you ate, you miserable penny-pincher," I said, "after the way you've menaced my stomach!"

He said the benediction and added, "Alright, let's make way for the little people to stuff themselves. You can go exercise until two, and I hope you haven't eaten so much it will make you sick."

I could not help gaping in laughter at that. He got very angry, told me I had to learn to be modest, added three or four tired maxims, and left. We sat down and, when I saw that the cause was lost and my innards were demanding justice, as the healthiest and strongest of the lot I attacked the platter together with everyone else and scarfed down two out of the three crusts and the one bit of skin. The others started complaining. The noise brought Cabra back and he said, "Eat like brothers, for God has given you this food. Don't quarrel, there's plenty for everyone." He went back into the sunlight and left us alone.

I swear to you, sir, that one of them, a Biscayan named Jurre, was so out of practice with how to eat and where to put the food that he twice brought his share, a tiny bit of crust, up to his eyes, and even on the third try did not manage to get it straight into his mouth. I asked for something to drink—unlike any of the others, who were practically fasting—and they gave me a glass of water. Hardly had I put it to my lips when the spirit-lad I mentioned before whisked it away, as if he were an acolyte removing the basin from a priest who had washed his hands before communion.

I stood up, feeling soul-sick to find I was living in a house where they might offer innards a toast but would never let them drink. I felt a need to disdine, though I had not dined—I mean, to relieve myself. So I asked an old-timer where the outhouses were, and he said, "The house is out of those; there aren't any. The first and only time you relieve yourself here, you can go just wherever. I've been here two months already and I haven't needed to go since the day I arrived, like you right now, and it was from what I ate at home the night before."

Could I possibly exaggerate how sad and gloomy I felt? It was so bad that, when I pondered how little would be entering my body, I did not dare expel anything from it, much as I wanted to.

We kept each other entertained until nightfall. Don Diego was asking me what he should do to convince his guts that they had eaten, because they did not want to believe it. Fainting spells were going around in that house the way spells of indigestion did in others.

Suppertime arrived, the time for midafternoon snacks having come and gone unmarked. We ate much less than at dinner, and no mutton at all, just a little bit of the teacher's namesake: *cabra asada*, roast goat. Tell me, sir, if the devil himself could have come up with anything so mean. "It's very healthy and beneficial," Cabra would say, "to eat a light supper so you can keep your stomach light," and he would cite a whole string of infernal physicians. He sang the praises of dieting, saying it would save a man from bad dreams—knowing that in his house it was impossible to dream of anything but eating. They ate supper, we ate supper, and no one ate anything for supper.

We went to bed, and all night long neither Don Diego nor I could fall asleep. He was busy planning how to complain to his father and beg him to get him out of there. I was busy advising him to do so. But in the end, I told him, "Sir, are you sure we're really alive? Because my guess is, we were killed in the battle with the cabbage women and now we're souls in Purgatory. So there's no point asking your father to get us out of here unless somebody prays a pardon rosary for us and springs us from punishment by ordering a Mass or two at a privileged altar."

Between these chats and the little bit of sleep we caught, it was soon time to get up. The clock rang six and Cabra called us to lessons. We went and listened to them all. My back and sides were already floating loose inside my doublet, and my legs had room inside my pants for another seven pairs. My teeth looked yellow with tartar, coated with desperation. I was told to read the first lesson in the primer to the others. I felt so hungry I breakfasted on the words, swallowing half of them. Anybody would find all this easy to believe if he heard what Cabra's

serving lad told me: soon after he arrived, he said, he saw two massive plow horses enter the house, and when they left two days later they were light steeds, flying like the wind. He saw huge mastiffs come in and leave three hours later as racing greyhounds. And one Lent, he ran into a lot of men at the entrance to the house, some sticking their feet through the gate, others their hands, and others their whole bodies, for the longest time, and plenty of people were coming from far and wide just to do that. One day, when he asked one of them what they were up to (Cabra would get angry to be asked), the man replied that some of the people had scabies and others had chilblains, but when they stuck the diseased parts into the house, their itching died of hunger, and since no eating ever went on in that house, they were no longer being eaten alive. The servant swore to me this was true. Knowing the house, I believe it. I say this so that my story will not sound like an exaggeration.

Going back to the lessons: he gave them, and we learned them by heart. And life went on exactly as I have described it. He only added a little bacon to the dinner meal, because of something or other he heard out there about how real hidalgos are supposed to behave.[22] So he got a metal box with little salt-shaker holes punched all over and filled it with a piece of bacon. Then he closed it up and dangled it into the soup pot from a string, giving the soup a little juice through the pinholes and keeping the bacon itself for the next day. Later, he decided that this cost him too much, so he started just holding the bacon near the pot. The pot pretended to meet the bacon, and we ate a few hints of ham hock.

You can imagine what sort of time we were having. Don Diego and I had almost reached the end of our rope, since we could not figure out how to get anything to eat. So after a month went by we tried to work out a way to avoid getting up in the morning. We settled on claiming we were sick with something. But we could not say it was fever—neither of us had fever, so the plot would be unmasked too easily—and a headache or toothache would have been too petty an excuse. In the end, we said we had stomachaches and were sick from not having gone for three days, confident that in exchange for saving the two pennies an enema would have cost, he would not bother to send for the medicine. But the devil had other plans in store, for it

22. The Inquisition kept tabs on those rumored to avoid bacon and lard, a habit viewed as a sign of "Judaizing." Some people suspected of being New Christians took to consuming pork ostentatiously in order to demonstrate their hidalgo status.

turned out he had inherited a formula from his father, an apothecary. When he learned of our illness, he prepared an enema solution, sent for his seventy-year-old aunt who served as nurse for his school, and told her to give us a clyster apiece.

They started with Don Diego. The hapless chap clammed up, so instead of injecting it straight into him the old woman squirted it up between his shirt and his back, hitting him in the noggin, and what was supposed to line his insides instead came to trim his outsides. She left the lad screaming. Cabra came in, saw him, and told them to give me the other shot and get back to Don Diego later. I resisted, for all the good it did me, because Cabra and others held me down while the old woman injected me. But I sent it all right back to her, full in the face. Cabra was furious and told me that, since this was obviously nothing but rascality, he was going to eject me from his house. But I was not so lucky.

We complained to Don Alonso, but old Cabra led him to believe that we did it because we were not keeping up with our studies. After that, our pleas got us nowhere.

He brought in the old woman to cook meals and serve the students, and he fired the serving boy one Friday morning when he discovered a few bread crumbs on the lad's vest. What we went through with the old woman, God certainly knows. She was so deaf she could not hear a thing and communicated by signs; blind; and so big on saying her prayers that one day her rosary broke and the beads fell into the pot, so she brought us the most pious broth I have ever eaten. Some of the boys said, "Black garbanzos! Must be from Ethiopia!" Others said, "Garbanzos in mourning! What relatives of theirs died?" It was my master who got a rosary bead in his broth, and when he bit down on it he cracked a tooth.

On Fridays she usually served us eggs with such thick beards—her own gray hairs—they could have been trying out for magistrates or lawyers. Our daily meal was a hearty bowl of soup, fortified by being stirred with the fire-shovel. I constantly found bugs, twigs, and her spinning fibers in the pot. She added all that to take up space in our stomachs and fill them out.

That was how we suffered until the next Lent rolled around. As it began, one of our schoolmates fell ill. To save money, Cabra waited to call a physician until the student needed confession more than anything. Then he called a practitioner, who took the boy's pulse and said that hunger had beat him to it, having killed the lad before he had a chance to do so. They gave him the sacrament, and when the poor fellow saw it—for he had gone a whole day without speaking—he

said, "My Lord Jesus Christ, I had to see you enter this house to be persuaded that this is not Hell."

These words impressed themselves on my heart. The poor lad died, we gave him a very poor funeral, since he was from out of town, and we all felt shocked. News of the appalling case spread through town and reached the ears of Don Alonso Coronel, who, having no other son, let his eyes be opened to the truth about Cabra's cruelties and started to give more credit to the words of two shades, since we had already been reduced to that miserable state. He came to pull us out of the boarding house, and as we stood in front of him he asked where he could find us. We were in such a condition when he saw us that, without waiting for more, he cursed out Professor Abstinence. He had us carried home in two sedan-chairs. We bid farewell to our schoolmates, whose desires and eyes followed us out the door, while they voiced the same laments heard from captives who stay behind in Algeria as they watch the Trinitarians ransom their cellmates.[23]

4

My Convalescence and Travel to Study in Alcalá de Henares

We got to Don Alonso's house and they put in two beds, setting us down very carefully to keep our hunger-gnawed bones from shattering and scattering. They brought in explorers to search all over our faces for our eyes. In my case, since I had endured greater suffering and superior hunger (they had, after all, treated me as a servant), it took them quite a while to find them. They brought in physicians, who told the servants to clean our mouths with feather dusters, the way images are dusted off in church. Indeed, we were images of suffering. They prescribed us nutritious soups and chicken broths. Who

23. The Trinitarian religious order specialized in ransoming Christians held in captivity by Algerian corsairs. Perhaps their most famous rescue was the ransoming in 1580 of Quevedo's older contemporary, Miguel de Cervantes.

could describe the fireworks of delight that our innards set off, celebrating their first sips of almond milk, their first morsels of chicken? Everything was spanking new to them. The doctors ordered everyone to speak in whispers in our bedroom for nine days, for our stomachs were so empty that any words would send echoes reverberating inside them. Through such measures we made a comeback and regained some strength. Our jaws, though, were so withered and creased they never would come unfolded, so the servants were ordered to pound and stretch them every day with a brass pestle.

Within forty days we were getting up and taking baby steps, though even then we looked like shadows of other men, so jaundiced and skinny we seemed like offspring of the Desert Fathers.[24] We spent all day giving thanks to God for rescuing us from our captivity under the savage Cabra, and we begged the Lord to let no other Christian fall into his cruel hands. Whenever we chanced to recall the meals at that evil boarding house while eating dinner, we would get so hungry that our food bills would double that day. We used to tell Don Alonso how Cabra would preach at table about the evils of gluttony, never having known it in his life. Don Alonso laughed out loud each time we told him how Cabra included partridges, capons, and all the things he refused to give us in his interpretation of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Indeed, he included appetite as well, judging from the way he skimped on food, for he seemed to think it a sin not merely to kill but even to wound your appetite.

Three months went by like this. Once they were past, Don Alonso arranged to send his son to Alcalá to study the grammar he lacked. He asked if I wished to go. Since I wanted nothing better than to get away from a place where I might hear someone utter the name of that wicked persecutor of stomachs, I offered to serve his son as he saw fit. And with that, he gave his son a servant to be his household steward and to keep track of his spending money, which he sent with us in the form of bills of exchange made out to a man named Julián Merluza. We loaded our things into a wagon belonging to one Diego Monje. These included one narrow bed, a trundle bed that rolled under it for me and the steward, who was named Baranda, five thin mattresses, eight sheets, eight pillows, four tapestries, a linen chest, and other household odds and ends. We got into a coach, left around dusk, about an hour before

24. Hermits and ascetics who lived in the Egyptian desert in the early years of Christianity.

nightfall, and arrived at midnight or a bit past at the ever-accursed tavern of Viveros.[25]

The tavern-keeper was a Morisco and a thief. I have never seen cat and dog get along so well together in my life.[26] He made a big show of welcoming us, and since he was in cahoots with the wagon-driver's underlings, who had arrived earlier with our luggage (for we were traveling slow), he ran over to our coach, offered me his hand to help me down, and asked me if I was going to study. I said I was. He brought me inside, where we found two pimps and some girls of the town, a devout priest fast on the girls' scent, a miserly old trader trying to forget that he had skipped supper, and two dishwashing students of the apron-wearing persuasion, on the lookout for scraps to scarf down. My master, being the latest arrival and just a boy, said, "My good man, give me whatever you have for me and my two servants."

"We're all your servants, sir," the pimps jumped in, "and at your service. Hey there, tavern-keeper! The gentleman here will thank you for anything you can do for him. Empty the larder!"

That said, one of them helped my master off with his cloak, saying, "Please sit down and rest, sir." And he set the cloak on a stone bench. All this went to my head and made me feel like I owned the place. One of the ladies said, "What a fine-looking gentleman! And going to study? Are you his servant?"

I replied, imagining that things were as she said and that both Don Diego and I were gentlemen. They asked me his name. No sooner did I tell them than one of the students went up to him, all but in tears, embraced him tightly, and said, "Oh, Don Diego, sir! Who could have told me, these ten years past, that I'd ever meet you like this? Poor me, I'm so changed I'm sure you'll never recognize me!"

25. The *venta de Viveros*, an inn on the Jarama River halfway between Madrid and the university town of Alcalá de Henares, was a frequent target of jokes about bad inns and thieving travelers in picaresque novels. It would take much longer than the few hours from dusk to midnight to walk seventy miles from Segovia to the inn, but Quevedo is sometimes careless about such details. The surnames in this paragraph seem intended for comic effect: *merluza* is hake, a common food fish; *monje*, monk; *baranda*, slang for beating, punishment.

26. "Cat" was slang for thief and "dog" was a widespread racist epithet for Moriscos and Jews. Moriscos were descendants of the Iberian Moors forcibly converted to Catholicism in the 1500s after the Spanish conquest of the southern Islamic kingdoms. The Moriscos were expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614 for alleged disloyalty to Church and Crown; an unknown number avoided expulsion.

Don Diego was astonished, and so was I, for we each could have sworn we had never seen him before in our lives. The second student stood there gazing at Don Diego's face, and he said to his friend, "Is this the gentleman whose father you're always talking about? We're so lucky you met him and recognized him, considering how he's grown! God bless him!"

And he began crossing himself. Who would have doubted they had grown up with us? Don Diego offered to help him however he could, and as he was asking them their names, the tavern-keeper came out and set the table and, catching a whiff of the swindle, said, "Save the talk for after supper—the food's getting cold."

One of the pimps came and pulled up benches for everyone and a chair for Don Diego, and the other one brought out a platter. The students said, "Please eat, sir. We'll gladly serve you while we're waiting for them to fix us something or other to eat."

"Goodness!" said Don Diego. "Please sit down yourselves, if you would be so kind."

The pimps replied unbidden, "Later, sir. The food is not yet done entirely to perfection."

As for me, when I saw two invited and two more self-invited guests, I was upset and feared what might come next, for the students grabbed the salad (a good-sized platter) and, looking at my master, said, "It isn't right that these ladies should be left out when such a great nobleman sits down to dine. Your honor, please allow them to have a bite."

He, playing the gallant, invited them. They sat down and, between them and the two students, finished off everything in four gulps, except for a lettuce stalk, which Don Diego ate. As that blasted student passed Don Diego the stalk, he said, "You had a grandfather (my own father's uncle) who fainted every time he saw a head of lettuce—what a perfect gentleman he was!"

Saying this he downed a roll, and the other downed another. The ladies, meanwhile, had finished off a loaf of bread. But the one who ate the most was the priest, with only his eyes. The two pimps sat down with half a roasted goat, two strips of bacon, and a couple of stewed pigeons, and said, "But Father, why so quiet? Come over and have a seat, for my lord Don Diego has invited us all. Darn it, the Church should come first."

No sooner had he said this than the priest sat down. When my master finally saw how many people had crashed his table, he began to get upset. They served all the food, giving Don Diego maybe a few bones and wings, saying, "From the goat, a bit of bone, and from the fowl, a

bit of wing," claiming that this was how an old saying went. The priest and the others scarfed down all the rest. The pimps said, "Don't eat too much, sir, it'll make you sick."

And the blasted student added, "Besides, you'll have to get used to lean meals if you want to be ready for life in Alcalá."

The other servant and I were praying to God to put it into their hearts to leave a little for us. After they had eaten everything, while the priest was giving the bones the others had left behind a second gnawing-over, one of the pimps turned around and said, "Oh, dear me! We haven't left anything for the servants. Come over here, please. Hey, tavern-keeper! Give them everything you have. Here's a doubloon."[27]

Without skipping a beat, my master's excommunicable kinsman (I mean, the student) jumped up and told the pimp, "Begging your pardon, sir: I am sure you are a fine hidalgo, but you must not know much about courtesy. Haven't you learned anything at all about my fine cousin? He'll provide for his servants—and for ours as well, if we had any—just as he has provided for us." Turning to the stunned Don Diego, he said, "Please don't be angry, sir, they don't know you."

I heartily cursed him when I saw his dissembling, which I thought boundless. They cleared the tables, and everyone told Don Diego he should go to bed. He wanted to pay for the supper. They replied that there would be plenty of time in the morning. They sat around a while chatting. They asked the student what his name was, and he said he was Don Something-or-other Coronel. May the imposter burn in hell, wherever he went! The student saw the miser, who had fallen asleep, and said, "How would you like a laugh, sir? Let's pull a trick on this old fellow, who hasn't eaten more than an apple the whole trip—and he's rich as can be."

The pimps said, "Bless you, professor, do it. It's only right."

With that, he went over and pulled the traveler's packs from under the poor old fellow's feet. Unrolling them, he found a box inside, and he mustered everyone round to see. Everyone came, and when he opened it, he saw it was filled with candies. He removed them all and replaced them with sticks, stones, and anything he could find. Then he relieved himself over it and put maybe a dozen chunks of plaster on top of it all. He closed the box and said, "But that's not all—he also has a wineskin." He emptied it of wine and, pulling the stuffing from one of the cushions in our coach, poured a bit of wine back into the skin, then filled it up with wool and cotton and stoppered it.

27. A gold doubloon or double-ducat was worth twenty-six silver *reales* at this time.

With that, everyone went to bed for the remaining hour or hour and a half of night. The student put everything back in the packs, stuck a big rock in the hood of the man's coat, and went to sleep.

Time came to get going. Everyone awoke, and the old man kept sleeping. They called him, and when he woke up he was unable to lift his hood. He saw what was going on, and the tavern-keeper purposely scolded him, saying, "God's body! Couldn't you have found something else to steal than this rock, old man? What do you all think? What if I hadn't caught him! This rock is worth more than a hundred ducats to me—it's good for stomachaches." The old man swore up and down that he had never put it in his hood.

The pimps added up the bill, and for supper alone it came to sixty *reales*. Not even Juan from Leganés could have understood their math.[28] The students said, "Since we'll be serving you in Alcalá, we'll call ourselves even."

We had a bite for breakfast. The old man took his packs and, to keep us from seeing what he took from them so that he would not have to share, he untied them in the dark under his coat. Then he grabbed a smeared chunk of plaster, tossed it into his mouth, and chomped down with his one remaining molar and half a tooth, very nearly losing both. He started spitting and making signs of gagging and pain. We all ran over, the priest first among us, to ask him what was wrong. He started cursing himself to Satan. He dropped the packs.

The student came up to him and said, "Get thee behind me! Behold the cross!"

The other student opened a breviary. They led him to believe he was possessed, and in the end he himself agreed, and he asked them to let him rinse his mouth out with some wine he was carrying in the wineskin. They let him. He took out the skin, opened it to pour a little wine into a small glass, and out came a wild wine, so shaggy and hairy with wool and cotton it could never be sipped or strained. That was when the old man lost all patience, but, seeing the others guffaw so raucously, he thought it best to keep quiet and get into the wagon with the pimps and women.

The students and the priest squeezed themselves onto one donkey while we got into the coach. Hardly had we begun to ride off when, one after another, they all started making fun of us, giving away the joke.

28. Juan Monje, an illiterate man from the town of Leganés, became legendary throughout Castile in the 1570s for his ability to solve complex arithmetic problems in his head.

The tavern-keeper said, "Young gentleman, a few more initiations like this and you'll grow up!"

The priest said, "I'm a vicar. I'll repay what I owe you in masses!"

And the blasted student shouted, "Dear cousin, next time you should scratch while you're getting bitten, not afterwards!"

The other one said, "At your scabies, Don Diego, sir!"

We pretended not to notice. God knows we were embarrassed. Between that and other things, we arrived in the town. We got off at an inn, and we spent all day long—for we got there at nine in the morning—going over and over the bill from that supper, but we could never get it straight.

5

My Arrival in Alcalá, the Patent, and How They Hazed Me

Before nightfall we left the inn for the house we had rented, which sat beyond the Puerta de Santiago: a student lodging where many are packed close, though in ours there were only three individuals. The landlord and owner was one of those who believe in God for the sake of appearances or deceitfully. They call them Moriscos in that town, for they have an abundant crop of such people, as well as of those who have more nose than they know what to do with, except when it comes to smelling bacon. I say this while admitting to the great nobility to be found among the leading people of the town, which is indeed something.[29] The landlord, anyway, received me worse than if I had been the Holy Sacrament. I am not even sure whether he did it because he wanted us to respect him or whether that is just his sort's nature, since bad dispositions must come easily to those who do not follow the good law. We set down our luggage, set up our beds and the rest, and went to sleep for the night.

29. More anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic jabs.

Day dawned, and there, half-dressed, stood all the students from the neighborhood, demanding my master pay them the "patent." He had no idea what they were talking about, so he asked me what this "patent" was that they were demanding. Fearing what might happen, I had meanwhile squeezed in between two straw mattresses, leaving only half my face poking out like a turtle. The "patent" turned out to be the initiation fee they extorted from every new student. They were demanding two dozen *reales*, which were promptly handed over. With that, they lifted their voices in a devil of a yell: "Long live our schoolmate! Let him join our fellowship! Let him enjoy all the privileges of us old-timers: getting fleas, wearing unwashed clothes, and going hungry like the rest of us!"

And with that (just think, what privileges!), they flew down the stairs. We quickly dressed and headed for the classrooms. My master was adopted by some college boys who knew his father, and he went to their lecture hall. But since I was to attend a different hall and went there alone, I began to tremble. I entered the quad. Hardly had I set foot there when they confronted me and started saying, "Newcomer!" To conceal my fear, I took to laughing as if it made no difference to me. But that was not good enough, because eight or nine of them walked over to me and started laughing. I blushed. I wish to God I had not, since right away a fellow standing next to me pinched his nose, stepped back, and said, "This Lazarus must still be waiting to be raised from the dead, the way he stinks."

At that, all the others stepped back and covered their noses. Thinking I could worm my way out of this, I also covered my nose and said, "You're right, it really does smell bad."

That only made them laugh harder, and when they stepped back there must have been about a hundred of them gathered round already. They started hawking their throats and sounding the call to arms. Between their coughing and the way they opened and closed their mouths, I could tell they were preparing a few loogies for me. Just then, a huge fellow from La Mancha with a bad cold sent a terrible one flying my way, saying, "Take that!"

Then, seeing I was sunk, I said, "I swear to God, I'll mur-"

I was going to say "-der," but the rain of artillery that fell on me was so bad I couldn't finish the word. I was covering my face with my cape, a perfect bull's-eye for them all to aim at, and their aim was truly something to see. They turned me solid white, head to toe. But when one rascal saw how I had covered up to keep my face clean, he ran towards me, yelling angrily at all the others, "Stop, don't kill

him!" From the way they treated me, I trusted them to really stop, so I uncovered my face to see what was up. At the same moment, the yelling fellow nailed me with a loogie straight between the eyes. You can imagine how defeated I felt. The infernal host raised a deafening cry. I was thinking, based on what they had launched at me from their stomachs, that they must save on doctors and medicine by waiting to purge themselves until some newcomer shows up. After this, they wanted to whack me on the back a few times, but they could not find a spot to hit me without sliming their hands with half the stuff they had spread on my black cape, now turned white with my sins. They left me, having turned me into an old man's spit basin. I went home, barely able to see where I was going. Luckily it was morning, because I only ran into two or three boys, who must have had good dispositions because they just pelted me with rags and kept on walking.

I went inside, and when the Morisco saw me he broke out laughing and pretended he was going to spit at me. Fearing he would really do it, I said, "Don't do it, landlord! I'm not an *Ecce Homo*!"[30]

I should never have said it, because he dished out two pounds of punishment on my back with a pair of scales he was carrying. With that extra tip, half-pulverized, I climbed upstairs. It took me the longest time to find a spot on my gown and cassock clean enough to grab them by and pull them off, but in the end I managed, and then after hanging them on a rooftop terrace I fell into bed.

My master returned. Finding me asleep, unaware of my execrable adventure, he grew angry and started yanking my hair so enthusiastically that a couple more tugs and I would have woken up bald. I got up yelling and complaining, while he, even more enraged, said, "Is this any way to serve, Pablos? It's another life now."

When I heard him say "another life," I took it to mean I had died, and I said, "Way to cheer me up in my tribulations, sir. Look at what they did to my gown and cassock out there—the biggest noses this side of a Holy Week procession used them for handkerchiefs." And with that, I burst into tears.

Seeing me cry, he believed me, and when he found the gowns and looked at them, he felt pity for me and said, "Pablos, wake up and smell the meat on the grill. You have to look out for yourself, because there's no mother or father here for you."

30. An *Ecce Homo* is an image of the humbled Christ as presented by Pilate to a hostile Jewish crowd before the crucifixion (John 19:5). The landlord is offended by the implication that he himself is Jewish.

I told him everything that had happened, and he ordered me to get undressed and go to my bedroom, which was where four of the other lodgers' servants slept. I lay down and slept. With that, by nighttime, after a good dinner and supper, I felt restored, almost as if nothing had ever happened to me. But once your misfortunes start rolling, they never seem to stop, for they come linked together, each bringing on the next. The other servants came in to go to sleep, and after they all greeted me, they asked me if I was sick and why I was in bed. I told them the story, and right away, as if none of them had a bad bone in their bodies, they started crossing themselves and saying, "Not even Lutherans would treat each other like that! Can such wickedness exist?"

Another said, "It's the Rector's fault for not putting a stop to it. Do you know who they were?"

I told them I did not, and I thanked them for the kindness they were showing me. With that, they finished getting undressed, got into bed, put out the light, and I fell asleep, dreaming that I was with my father and my brothers. It must have been twelve when one of them woke me up screaming, "Ay! They're going to kill me! Robbers!"

From his bed, amid his shouts, came the sound of a whip cracking. I raised my head and asked, "What's going on?"

I had hardly uncovered myself when they landed a lash like a cat o' nine tails all across my back. I started whining and trying to get up. The other fellow whimpered, too, and whipped only me. I began saying, "For God's sake, stop!" But the whip blows were falling on me so thick and fast that, having already thrown off the blankets, I had nothing else to do but hide under the bed. I did so, and immediately the three who were still asleep started shouting, too. Since I could still hear the whip cracking, I thought some outsider was attacking us all.

Meanwhile, the blasted fellow next to me went over to my bed, relieved himself on it, and covered it up. When he got back to his own, the whipping stopped and all four shouted, "You rascallion, you! Don't think you'll get away with it!" I was still hiding under the bed, whining like a dog caught between two doors, rolled into such a tight ball that I looked like a greyhound with leg cramps. The other pretended to close the door, and then I climbed out from my hiding place and onto my bed, asking if any of them had been hurt. They all complained like they were about to die.

I lay down, covered myself, and went back to sleep. I must have tossed and turned in my sleep, because when I awoke I was mired to the gills. All the others got up. I used the whipping as an excuse to stay under the covers. Not all the demons in Hell could have moved me.

I was confused, wondering if somehow, in my fear and agitation or deep in sleep, I had produced that filth without realizing it. In the end, I found myself innocent and guilty, and did not know how to expunge my record.

My companions, moaning very convincingly, came over and asked how I was feeling. I told them I felt terrible because I had been whipped so badly. I asked them who it could have been, and they said, "He'll never get away, because the mathematician will be on the case.[31] But, leaving that aside, let's see if you're wounded, because you were moaning very loudly."

And with that, they were about to rip off my blankets with the intention of shaming me. But just then my master walked in, saying, "Is it possible, Pablos? Are you going to be too much for me to handle? Already eight, and there you are, lying around in bed! Get up, blast you!"

The others, to back me up, told Don Diego the whole story and begged him to let me keep sleeping. And one of them added, "And if you don't believe it, sir—well, stand up, my friend." And he grabbed the blanket. I was holding it clasped with gritted teeth to keep the shit from showing. When they saw that path closed off to them, one said, "God's body, it stinks in here!"

Don Diego agreed, because it was true. Then they all followed him in searching the bedroom to see if there was a full chamberpot somewhere. They said they could not stand to be there. One said, "Well, that's a good way to get us off to our studies!" They looked at the beds and turned them up to look underneath and said, "No doubt there's something under Pablos' bed. Let's move him onto one of ours and look under his."

I saw little way out of my predicament and could tell they were about to nab me, so I pretended I was having a heartquake: I grasped the sides of the bed, making faces. The others knew the mystery and squeezed in around me, saying, "How terribly sad!" Don Diego pulled my heart finger,[32] and in the end the five of them together picked me up. And when the blankets were lifted, they all laughed so hard to

31. A mathematician would ascertain what had happened by measuring the stars. Astrology, considered a branch of mathematics, was still a respected science at the time.

32. An old home remedy for heart problems. The "heart finger" (*dedo del corazón*, the middle finger) was thought to be connected directly to the heart. A "heartquake" (*mal de corazón*) could be any fainting spell, not necessarily what modern medicine terms a heart attack.

see the bed so freshly not just bedaubed but beglobbed, they brought down the bedroom. "Poor fellow!" said the rascals. I was pretending I had fainted. "Yank hard on that heart finger for him, sir!"

And my master, meaning to help me, pulled it so hard, he dislocated it. The others also tried putting tourniquets on my legs, saying, "Poor fellow must have soiled himself now when he was stricken." How awful I felt, first of all from shame, but also from a disjointed finger and the danger I was in of having my legs throttled! In the end, fearing that they would really do it—for they already had the ropes around my legs—I pretended to revive as quickly as possible. But the rascals were out to get me, so they already had the ropes biting an inch into my thighs. They left off, saying, "Good Lord, you're skinny!" I was crying with anger, and they were purposely saying, "Your health is more important than whether or not you soiled yourself. Shut up."

And with that, they put me in bed, after first washing me, and left. All I did when I was alone was ponder the fact that more bad things had happened to me in one day in Alcalá than in nearly the whole time I had been with Cabra. At midday I got dressed, cleaned my undershirt as best I could, laundering it like a soiled horse blanket, and waited for my master, who asked me how I was doing as soon as he returned. Everyone living in the house had dinner, as did I, though little and grudgingly. And later on, when we all gathered round to chat in the hallway, after the other servants were done making fun of me, they gave away the joke. Everyone laughed. I felt doubly insulted, and I told myself, "Heads up, Pablos, be on guard." I resolved to live a new life. And with that, I made up with the other lodgers, and from then on we all lived like brothers, and in the quads and classrooms nobody bothered me anymore.

6

The Housekeeper's Cruelties and the Pranks I Pulled

"Do as the Romans do," the saying goes, and it goes right. After a long reflection on what that saying means, I resolved to become a

rascal among rascals, and bigger than the rest if I could. I am not sure if I pulled it off, but I assure you, sir, I did the best job I could.

First off, I imposed the death penalty on every pig that wandered into the house, and also on any of the housekeeper's chickens that entered my bedroom. It so happened one day that two of the most elegant swine I have ever seen came inside. I was playing with the other servants and heard the pigs grunt. I said to another servant, "Go see who's grunting in our house." He saw and said it was two hogs. When I heard that, I flew into a rage and went out there, saying it was too rascally and insulting to go around grunting in other people's houses. That said, I buried my sword into each of their breasts, behind closed doors, and then we slit their throats. To keep their squeals from being heard, we all joined in shouting a loud song, and so they expired in our arms. We removed their entrails, collected the blood, used some straw mattresses to semi-singe them, so that by the time our masters returned the deed was done, albeit badly, except for the entrails, which we had not yet turned into blood sausages. And that was not for lack of rushing, to tell the truth—we had even left the innards half-full of what they came with, so as not to slow us down.

Don Diego and his steward found out what had happened, and they got so angry at me that the lodgers, who were laughing so hard they could hardly stand, felt forced to back me up. Don Diego was asking me what I would say if someone reported me and I were arrested. I replied that I would take refuge in hunger, the sanctuary of students, and if that excuse did not stand up, I would say, "Since they entered without knocking, as if they were at home, I figured they must belong to us."

Everyone laughed at my excuses. Don Diego said, "My word, Pablos, you're getting the hang of this." It was remarkable to see my master so decorous and religious and me so mischievous, so that we each exaggerated the other's virtue or vice.

The housekeeper was bursting with happiness, for we were now two against one: the two of us conspiring against the larder. I became Judas the bagman, and ever since then I've sort of had a fondness for pilfering in that line of work. The meat did not follow the rules of good rhetorical style in the housekeeper's hands, for it always went from more to less. Whenever she could add goat or sheep to the pot, she would leave out the good mutton. If there were bones, not a bit of lean meat on them. She was as good at clipping portions as she was at shaving coins, and so she would come up with consumptively thin pots—stews that, solidified, would have been crystal beads. On the

major feast days, for something special, she would fatten up the stew by throwing in a few tallow candle ends.

She used to tell my master, in my hearing, "There's sure no servant like little Pablicos. If only he wasn't so mischievous! Keep him with you, sir. You can easily put up with a little mischief in exchange for his loyalty. He brings home the best the market offers."

I accordingly said the same about her, and so we kept the whole house in the dark. If they bought a large amount of oil or charcoal or bacon, we would hide half of it, and when we felt the time was right, the housekeeper and I would say, "Please cut back on your spending, gentlemen, because if you keep it up at this rate, a king's treasury won't be enough. We've already run out of oil (or charcoal). Why go through it so fast? Please, sir, give the word to buy more, and for sure we'll have to change the way we keep the lights on. Give Pablicos some money."

They would give it to me, and we would sell the half we had pilfered, and we would pilfer the other half of what we bought. That was our way in everything. If I ever bought something in the marketplace for what it was worth, the housekeeper and I would make a show of arguing about it. She would say, as if in anger, "Don't you tell me, Pablicos, that this is two pennyworth of salad."

I would pretend to cry, then I would shout and run off to complain to my master, pressing him to send the steward to find out if I was telling the truth so that the housekeeper would shut up, for she would be cursing on purpose. He would go and find out, and in this way we reassured my master and his steward, and they were grateful: grateful to me for the work I did and to the housekeeper for her zeal in looking after their interests. Don Diego would say to her, very satisfied with me, "If only Pablicos worked as hard on virtue as he does at being trustworthy! Is this the loyalty you're always telling me about in him?"

We strung them along in this way, bleeding them like leeches. I bet, sir, you would be shocked by how much money it came to at the end of the year. It must have been a lot, but we were not obliged to repay it, because the housekeeper went to confession week in and week out, and I never saw a trace or a hint of her returning anything or feeling any scruples, and yet she was, as I say, a saint. She always wore a rosary around her neck, so huge it would have been easier to carry a load of firewood on her back. From it hung whole fistfuls of images, crosses, and pardon-bead strings[33] jangling like bells. She would bless the stew

33. Strings of pardon beads were similar to rosaries. Praying over them was believed to grant a person an indulgence or pardon from future time in Purgatory.

pots, and when she skimmed the broth she would make the sign of the cross with the ladle. I think she was conjuring them to remove any spirits, since they contained no flesh. She said she prayed nightly for her benefactors over each of the images. She counted a hundred some-odd saints as her patrons, and to tell the truth she needed all their help to make up for her sins. She slept in the bedroom above my master's, and she recited more prayers than a blind man: she would start with the "Just Judge" and end with the "Conky Volley," as she put it, and the "Salvee Rejeanie."[34] She purposely recited the prayers in Latin to pretend she was innocent, in such a way that we all broke up laughing. She had other skills: she was a conqueror of feelings and a binder of desires, which is to say, a procuress. But she excused herself for it, explaining to me it was a natural ability that was passed down in her family, like the king of France and curing scrofula.[35]

Do you suppose we were always friendly, sir? Well, who is unaware that if two friends are greedy, they must try to trick each other whenever they are together?

It so happened that the housekeeper raised chickens in the courtyard of the house. I felt like making a meal of one. She had twelve or thirteen fairly good-sized pullets, and one day when she was feeding them, she started saying "Pio! Pio!" over and over again. When I heard the way she called them, I started moaning, "Oh, God's body! Housekeeper, if only you'd killed a man or stolen the king's money or something else that I could have hushed up, or done anything other than what you just did! Because there's no way I can keep quiet about this! What a calamity, for me and for you!"

When she heard me making such a genuine show of despair, she grew a bit worried and said, "But Pablos, what did I do? If this is one of your jokes, just stop bothering me now."

"You think it's a joke, dang it! I have no choice now: I'll have to inform the Inquisition, or else they'll excommunicate me."

"The Inquisition?" she said, and she started to tremble. "But did I do something against the Faith?"

34. "The Just Judge" (*Justo Juez*) is still a popular folk prayer, addressed to Jesus in his role as righteous and merciful judge. The others are mangled Latin prayers: the *Quicumque vult* or Athanasian Creed and the *Salve Regina* or Hail Holy Queen.

35. It was long believed in France and England that the royal touch could cure the "King's Evil" (scrofula, lymphatic tuberculosis). Quevedo mocks this non-Spanish custom.

"That's the worst of it," I said. "You can't joke around with the Inquisitors. Tell them you were being foolish and that you recant, and don't deny your blasphemy and lack of respect."

She, the fear upon her, said, "But Pablos, if I recant, will I be punished?"

I replied, "No, because then they'll just absolve you."

"Then I recant," she said. "But tell me, what am I recanting? Because I have no idea, may the souls of my deceased rest in peace."

"Did you really not notice it? I don't know how I can dare tell you—it's so disrespectful, it scares me. Don't you remember how you said 'Pio, Pio' to call the chicks? And Pio is the name of so many popes! Vicars of God, heads of the Church![36] Put that peccadillo in your pipe and puff on it."

Shocked and stunned, she said, "Pablos, I did say it, but God strike me if I meant anything bad by it. I recant! See if there's any way you can get out of accusing me, because I'll die if I find myself hauled in front of the Inquisition."

"Since you have solemnly sworn that you meant nothing bad, I feel reassured and I won't have to denounce you. But you'll have to give me those two pullets, because they ate after you called them by the Pope's holy name. I'll bring them to a familiar of the Inquisition to burn them, because they're ruined. And after that, you'll have to swear that you'll never backslide."

She quite happily said, "Well, go ahead and take them, Pablos, and I'll swear it tomorrow."

The better to convince her, I said, "The real problem, Cepriana (that was her name), is that I would be taking a risk, because the familiar will ask if I was the one who did it, and in the meantime he might prosecute me. Better for you to take them, because, by gosh, I'm afraid."

"Pablos," she said when she heard this, "by the love of God, have pity on me and take them yourself, because they can't do anything to you."

I let her beg me for the longest time, until in the end I agreed to what I wanted all along. I took the pullets and hid them in my bedroom. I pretended to go out, and when I came back inside I said, "It went better than I had expected. The good old familiar wanted to

36. Pius (in Spanish, Pío) was the name of several popes, the most recent in Quevedo's time being Pius V (1566–1572).

follow me back here to see the woman who had done it, but I smooth-talked and wheedled him out of it."

She gave me a thousand hugs and another pullet for my own, which I added to its hidden companions, and I had a baker turn the three of them into pot pies. And the other servants and I ate them all. The housekeeper and Don Diego found out the truth about my tangled web, and the whole house celebrated it immensely. The housekeeper was so embarrassed she almost died, and in her rage she came this close to revealing my pilfering—but she had reasons of her own for keeping quiet.

I saw I had gotten on the housekeeper's bad side and could no longer pull tricks on her, so I sought other ploys to stay idle and happy, and I hit on what students call "swiping" or "ripping off." In the process some very amusing things happened, because one night around nine, when very few people are still out, I was walking around Calle Mayor, and I saw a sweets shop, and inside it, a basket of raisins on the shop counter. Gathering speed, I ducked in, grabbed it, and ran off. The shopkeeper ran after me, and other servants and neighbors joined in. Since I was burdened by the basket, I saw that they would catch up with me despite my head start, so after rounding a corner I sat down on the basket, quickly draped my cape over my legs, and holding my leg I starting saying, "Ay! God forgive him, he stomped my foot!" They heard me say this, and when they reached me I began to say, "By our Holy Lady," adding the usual beggar's prattle about bad luck and miasmic air. They came bellowing along and asked me, "Did a man pass by here, brother?"

"He went that way, and he stomped my foot right here, praised be the Lord."

They took off running when they heard this. I was left alone. I brought the basket home, told the story of my trick, and no one wanted to believe it was true, much as they celebrated it. So I invited them to come watch me swipe boxes the next night.

They came, and when they saw that the boxes were inside the shop and that I could not just walk off with them, they held it to be impossible, especially since this shopkeeper was on the alert after what had happened to the other shopkeeper with the raisins. So I came and, drawing my sword (a stout longsword) a dozen paces before reaching the shop, I took off running, and when I got there I cried, "Die!" and lunged with my longsword straight at the shopkeeper. He collapsed, begging for confession, and my lunging longsword plunged right into a box. Skewering it on the sword, I ran out with it.

They were astonished to see my ploy, and they keeled over with laughter to hear the shopkeeper asking for medical attention, saying that he must have been wounded and that the culprit was a man he had had words with earlier. But, looking up, he saw the boxes that had fallen down when the one in the middle was pulled out, and he figured out the trick and started crossing himself so many times it looked like he would never stop.

I confess that nothing I did ever tasted so sweet. My companions said that I could feed the whole house myself with what I swiped (which is the same as stealing, in student slang). Being just a boy, and seeing them praise my wit in carrying out these pranks, I was inspired to keep doing it. Every day I came home with a waistbelt full of nuns' mugs. I would ask nuns for something to drink, and run off with the vessel: I was the one who introduced the practice of requiring a deposit before handing out anything.

And then I promised Don Diego and all my companions that one night I would steal the night patrol's own swords. We picked a date, and we all went together, me in front. As soon as we caught sight of the officers, I went up to them with one of the other servants from our house and, acting very agitated, asked, "Officers?"

They answered, "Yes."

"Is that the chief magistrate?"

They said he was. I kneeled and said, "Sir, my hopes and my vengeance are in your hands. And the welfare of the republic, too. Please, sir, allow me two words in private, should you wish to make an important arrest."

He stepped aside, and already the deputies were drawing their swords and the constables handling their staffs. I said to him, "Sir, I have come from Seville on the trail of six men, the wickedest in the world, robbers and man-killers all. And among them is one who killed my mother and one of my brothers in a highway robbery, and that is a proven fact. From what I have heard, they are here with a French spy. And from what I heard them say, I even suspect that he is . . . ," and, lowering my voice to even more of a whisper, I said, "Antonio Pérez."[37]

At this, the magistrate leapt up and said, "Where are they?"

37. The disgraced former secretary of Phillip II, Antonio Pérez fled to France in 1591. He was suspected of running a ring of spies in Spain from there, making him the most wanted man in Spain. He died in 1611.

"Sir, in the brothel. Please don't delay, sir. The souls of my mother and brothers will repay you in prayers, and the King will repay you in this world."

"Good Lord, why are we waiting? Everybody after me! Hand me a buckler."

Pulling him aside again, I said, "Sir, you'll lose him that way. The main thing is for all of you to go inside one at a time, with no swords, because they are in the bedrooms and they are carrying pistolets, and if they see you coming in with swords, which only officers are allowed to carry, they'll fire on you. Better use daggers and take them from behind, since there are plenty of us."

The plan delighted the magistrate, he was so greedy to make the arrest. Meanwhile, we were almost there. They informed the magistrate, who ordered everyone to hide their swords under some bushes in a field nearly in front of the house. They did so and walked on. I had warned my companion not to let any time pass between their leaving the swords and his taking them and skipping off home, and that is what he did. When all the officers were going inside, I held back behind the last one in line, and while they mixed in with the other people heading in, I gave them the slip and ran down an alley that comes out near Plaza de la Victoria, running so fast a greyhound could not have caught me. After they entered and found nothing (because there was nothing there but students and rogues, which amounts to the same thing), they started looking for me, and when they could not find me they suspected what was up. They went to get their swords and did not find jackstraw.

Who could recount the lengths that the rector and the magistrate went to that night! They visited every student lodging and peered into every face. They reached our house. To keep them from recognizing me, I lay in bed with a bandage around my head, a candle in one hand and a crucifix in the other, while a companion playing a priest comforted me while I died, and the others recited the litanies. The rector and the officers arrived, saw the spectacle, and left, unable to believe they could find anything there. They did not even look. In fact, the rector said a prayer for the dead over me. He asked if I had already lost speech, and they said I had. Then they left, desperate to pick up the trail, the rector swearing to turn in the culprit when he found him, the magistrate swearing to hang him even if he proved to be a grandee's son. I got out of bed, and to this day they are still toasting that prank in Alcalá.

To cut this short, I will leave out the story of how I turned the town's marketplace into my hunting grounds, for we kept the chimney in our house going almost all year long on the crates of tailors and jewelers and the tables of fruit sellers (for I never forgot how they affronted me when I was King of the Roosters). I will keep quiet about the taxes I levied on the beanfields, vineyards, and orchards in the countryside all around. Between these and other things, I began to get a wide reputation as a mischief-maker and a wit. The gentlemen took a liking to me, and they hardly let me serve Don Diego, whom I always treated with the respect he deserved for the great affection he showed me.

7

The Departure of Don Diego, News of My Parents' Deaths, and the Resolution I Came to about My Future

During this time, Don Diego got a letter from his father, and in the envelope there was another letter from an uncle of mine named Alonso Ramplón,[38] a man fond of every virtue and famous in Segovia for his fondness of executing justice, since every execution for the past four years had been at his hands. He was a hangman, truth be told, but so light and lively at his trade that if you saw him at it you would want to be hanged yourself. He was the one, then, who wrote me a letter from Segovia, and it went like this:

38. *Ramplón* means a large plowman's shoe or the rough country person who wears it; a clodhopper. In the letter that follows, Ramplón accurately describes the public executions of the time, including the gruesome practice of hewing the hanged prisoner's body in four and exhibiting the pieces along the roads leading into town as a warning to criminals. The unidentifiable ground meat in the cheap meat pastries of the era (*pasteles de a cuarto*, which cost a quarter of a half-*real* each) was a favorite target of Quevedo's morbid jokes. Look for the puns on quartered bodies and the coin called a *cuarto* or quarter.

"Pablos, my son" (he called me this because he loved me so much), "the heavy duties of this position in which His Majesty employs me have left me with no time to write; for, if there is any drawback to serving the King, it is that one has to work, though the dim honor of being his servant does make up for that.

"I am sorry to have to give you some unpleasant news. Your father died a week ago, as bravely as ever a man has died in this world. I say this as the one who strung him up. He climbed onto the donkey without setting foot in the stirrup. The prison tunic fit him so well it looked made to measure. And with that presence he had, nobody who saw him trailing behind the procession of crucifixes would have figured him for the one about to be hanged. He rode calmly and completely at his ease, gazing up at windows and bowing to those who left their labors to watch him pass. He twirled his mustache twice. He told the confessors to stop and rest, and he praised everything good they said.

"He reached the scaffold, stepped onto the ladder, did not climb it slowly or crawl up on hands and knees, and when he saw a broken rung he turned to the officer and said he should get it fixed for the next fellow, since not everyone has his nerve. I cannot extol enough how fine he looked to everyone. He sat down on top, smoothed back the wrinkles in his clothes, picked up the noose and set it around his Adam's apple. When he saw that the priest wanted to preach him a sermon, he turned to him and said, 'Father, let's consider the sermon already preached. Just give us a bit of the Credo and wrap it up, because I don't want it to look like I'm lingering.'

"And so it was done. He asked me to set the hood aside and to brush his beard. I did. He fell without twitching his legs or pulling a face. You could not ask for greater gravity. I turned him into quarters and gave him the roads for his tomb. God knows how it pains me to see him out there, a banquet for crows. But I understand that the local piemen will console us by finding him a home in the potpies they sell for quarters.

"As for your mother, though she is still alive, I can almost tell you the same story, because the Inquisition in

Toledo is holding her prisoner for digging up the dead, and I do not mean spreading rumors about them. They say she kissed a goat every night on the eye that has no pupil.[39] They found more legs, arms, and heads in her bedroom than you would find in a miracle shrine.[40] And at the very least she created maidenhead covers and reconstructed virgins. They say she will put on her last act in an auto-da-fé on Trinity Sunday, featuring the deadly four hundred.[41] It pains me that she has dishonored us all, especially me, for in the end I am the King's minister and having family ties of this sort could give me a bad name.

"Son, your parents have left some sort of bequest for you hidden here. It may come to as much as four hundred ducats all told.[42] I am your uncle, and whatever I have will be for you. In view of this, you should come here, because, with your knowledge of Latin and rhetoric, you will excel at the hangman's art. Reply without delay, and in the meantime may God keep you, etc."

I cannot deny that the new affront pained me, but I also rejoiced in part: such is the power of parents' vices that, no matter how far they fall, their children find consolation. I went running to Don Diego, who was reading his father's letter. In it, his father ordered him to leave Alcalá and not to bring me with him, because he had caught wind of my pranks. Don Diego said he had made up his mind to leave, and he told me all about his father's commands, for he was sorry to have to leave me (though not as sorry as I was). He told me he would find a position for me with another gentleman, a friend of his whom I could serve. When he said this, I laughed and replied, "Sir, I am a changed man now, and my thoughts have changed. I feel the need for a higher

39. Witches were said to worship the devil in the form of a large male goat, kissing it on the anus ("eye without a pupil") and gaining the ability to fly.

40. The walls of many popular shrines are lined with small silver and wax medallions in the shapes of the body parts that were miraculously cured there. Witches, for their part, were said to use human body parts in their magic.

41. That is, four hundred lashes, a usually fatal punishment.

42. Four hundred ducats were worth between four thousand and five thousand silver *reales* at the time. The *escudo* or *ducado* (the words were used interchangeably in this period) was a gold coin about the size of a dime.

position and greater authority. I have always held my head as high as anyone, but now my father's head has been raised higher than the rest."

I announced how my father had died an honored man, the public's most wanted; how they had carved him and made coins of him—quarters, in fact; how my uncle the hangman had written me about all this, and also about my mother's little run-in with the law. Don Diego knew me for who I was, so I could reveal everything to him without shame. He felt very sorry and asked me what I was thinking of doing. I let him know my plans. And with that, he left for Segovia the next day, feeling quite sad, while I stayed on at the house, concealing my hard luck.

I burned the letter so no one could read it if I misplaced it somehow, and I began to plan my return to Segovia, where I meant to collect my inheritance and meet my relatives so that I could get away from them.

BOOK TWO

1

The Road from Alcalá to Segovia and How I Fared on It as Far as Rejas, Where I Spent the Night

The day came when it was time for me to move on from the best life I had ever known. Lord knows how much I regretted leaving so many friends and people who cared about me behind, who were beyond number. I secretly sold the little I had in order to raise travel money, and with the help of a few tricks I made some six hundred *reales*. I hired a mule and rode off, leaving nothing behind but my shadow. Who could describe the anguish of the shoemaker over my tab, the urgent requests of the housekeeper for her salary, the loud demands by the landlord for the rent? One said, "My heart always warned me!" Another, "They were right to tell me that fellow was a cheat!" In the end the town loved me so well, I left half of them weeping at my absence and the other half laughing at the ones who wept.

I was whiling away the time, mulling these things over, when, just after I passed the Torote,[43] I met a man on a pack-mule who was talking to himself as fast as you can imagine, so absorbed that he did not see me even when I was riding by his side. I greeted him and he greeted me. I asked him where he was going, and after exchanging replies we began discussing whether the Turk was on the move and how the King's forces were positioned. He began to tell me how the

43. The Torote is a small stream that crosses the Madrid road three miles west of Alcalá. From here, Pablos continues another three miles to the next small town, Torrejón, then four miles to an inn by another stream, the Rejas (today the southern boundary of Barajas Airport), and finally eight more miles to central Madrid.

Holy Land could be won and how to take Algeria, discussions that soon told me that here was one of those madmen who are always thinking about good government and saving the republic.[44] We kept up this conversation, the sort any two scoundrels would have, and between one thing and another we ended up in Flanders. This was when he started sighing and telling me, "Those countries have taken a greater toll on me than on the King, because I've had a project for the past fourteen years that would have solved everything by now, if only it weren't impossible to carry out."

"What sort of project could it be," I asked him, "that is so useful and yet so impossible that it can't be done?"

"Who told you, sir," he quickly said, "that it can't be done? It certainly can be done. Being impossible is a separate issue. And if I weren't afraid to bore you, I would tell you the whole plan. But it will soon be out there, because I am on my way to have it printed up, along with some other schemes of mine. In one of them, I offer the King a way to take Ostend from two directions."[45]

I begged him to tell it to me. Pulling the scheme out of his pocket, he showed me a drawing of the enemy's fortifications and our own, and he said, "Here you can easily see, sir, that the whole problem lies in this bit of sea. Well, I would give an order to dry it all up with sponges and get rid of it."

This piece of nonsense set me to laughing out loud. He looked me straight in the face and said, "That's exactly how everybody reacts when I tell them, it makes them all so happy."

"That I can believe," I said, "after hearing such a novel and well-grounded idea. But please observe: after they drain all the water that was there, the sea will let more back in."

"The sea won't do anything of the sort! I have it all planned out," he replied. "Besides, I've thought of a new invention to lower the sea around there by twelve fathoms."

44. The man is an *arbitrista*, one of the many reformers who developed and promoted projects or schemes (*arbitrios*) that they were sure would solve the royal government's economic, political, and military problems in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Major concerns included wars with the Ottoman Empire in the east and with French, English, and Dutch forces in Flanders in the north, a region then in rebellion against Spanish rule. The *arbitrista* is the first of several contemporary types satirized in this section of the novel.

45. The Spanish siege of Ostend, Flanders, between 1601 and 1604 was the longest and bloodiest battle of the Eighty Years' War.

I dared not answer this, fearing he would tell me he had a scheme to bring the sky crashing down. I have never met such a lunatic. He told me that what Juanelo had done was nothing: he was now working on an easier plan to bring all the water of the Tagus to Toledo.[46] Asked how, he said, "Like magic." Imagine, who has ever heard such a thing! And finally, he said, "But I don't plan to carry it out unless the King first grants me a pension, which I am fully qualified to hold, and I have a decree of hidalgo status that's completely honorable."

With these discussions and inanities we reached Torrejón, where he remained, for he had gone there to visit a relative of his.

I continued on my way, dying of laughter at the schemes he wasted his time on, when, Glory be, in the distance I saw an unyoked mule and, standing next to it, a man drawing lines and measuring them with a compass. He was turning and leaping from side to side, placing one finger over the other now and then, and performing a thousand tricks with them as he leapt. For a long time, I confess (for I had stopped to watch him from a distance), I suspected he was a magician, and I almost felt like turning back. In the end I made up my mind to keep going. When he heard me approach he closed his book and, as he placed his foot in the stirrup, he slipped and fell. I helped him up and he said, "I mismeasured the proportional space needed to make the circumference for mounting."[47]

I could not understand a word he said and immediately felt afraid of what he might be, for a more deranged man has never been of woman born. He asked whether I was traveling to Madrid by straight line or by a circumflex route. I replied, though I could not understand him, that it was the circumflex one. He asked me whose sword I wore at my side. I said it was my own.[48] Looking at it, he said, "Those cross-guards need to be longer in order to deflect the downcuts that occur in midthrusts." And he launched into such a stream of gab that I felt

46. The Italian engineer Juanelo Turriano (1500–1585) famously invented and built an elaborate mechanism to supply the city of Toledo with water from the Tagus, some 100 meters below.

47. This object of Quevedo's satire is a "mathematical" fencer who follows the "true art" of swordsmanship. Some critics see this passage as a parody of Quevedo's own confrontation with the noted author on swordsmanship, Luis Pacheco de Narváez, in 1608. In Quevedo's version of the story, their encounter ended when Quevedo skewered Pacheco's hat with his sword by using a move that Pacheco had described as impossible.

48. The man is asking the name of the sword's maker, not who owns it. Quevedo uses Pablos' commonsense approach to swords to mock technical fencing jargon.

forced to ask him what subject he taught. He told me he was a true fencing master and that he would prove it anywhere.

Provoked to laughter, I said, "Well, the truth is that, from what I saw back there, I rather thought you were a sorcerer, the way you were drawing circles."

"That," he said, "was me performing a quarter-circular parry with upbeat movement, capturing the sword to kill the opponent at one blow so that he cannot see it coming, and I was putting it all in mathematical terms."

"Is it possible," I asked, "that there's mathematics in this?"

He said, "Not just mathematics, but theology, philosophy, music, and medicine."

"No doubt about that last one, since fencing and medicine are both deadly arts."

"This is no joke," he said. "Right now I'm learning the sweeping counterthrust with heightened downcuts, which themselves comprise the spiral circulars of the blade."

"I don't understand a single word you're saying, long or short."

"Well, they all come straight from this book," he replied, "which is called *The Greatness of the Sword*, and it's wonderful and tells you all sorts of marvelous things.[49] And so that you'll believe me, you'll see me perform miracles with a pair of meat skewers by the Rejas, where we'll stop for the night. And have no doubt: anybody who reads this book will be able to kill as many people as he wants."

"Then either the book teaches you how to create plagues," I said, "or its author was a doctor."

"How do you mean, a doctor? Understand," he told me, "he's a very smart man, and I could keep going."

In such conversations we reached the Rejas. We dismounted at an inn, and as we dismounted he loudly warned me to make an obtuse angle with my legs and, by reducing the angle to parallel lines, to place myself perpendicular to the ground. The innkeeper saw me laughing and laughed, too, asking me if the stuff that gentleman was speaking was Indian. That almost sent me into fits of laughter. Then the man went up to the innkeeper and said, "Sir, please loan me a pair of skewers so I can do a couple of angles, and I will return them instantly."

49. A reference to Pacheco's first and most popular book, *Libro de las grandezas de la espada* (1600).

"Lord!" said the innkeeper. "Just give me the angles and my wife will roast them for you, sir, though I've never heard of such birds before."

"Angles aren't birds!" he said, turning to me. "See what it is to be ignorant. Give me the skewers. I only want them to fence with, and you may profit more by what you see me do today than by your whole lifetime of earnings."

In the end, it turned out that the skewers were already being used, so we had to make do with a pair of ladles. Such a laughable sight has never been seen in the world. He leapt forwards and said, "This movement gains me more ground and presents me in profile. Now I'll execute a remise to finish off the natural. This is supposed to be a downcut, and this is a side-slash."

He had not come within a mile of me as he danced around with the spoon. Since I was standing still, he looked like he was thrusting at a pot boiling over on the fire. In the end he said, "This is the right way, not the drunken nonsense taught by those fencing-master rascals who only know how to drink."

He had not even finished saying this when out from a bedroom came a huge mulatto, baring his canines, wearing a hat wide as an umbrella and a buff coat under a loose vest bedecked in ribbons, bandy-legged as the imperial eagle, with a broad scar crossing his face, a burly beard and handlebar moustaches, and a dagger with more wrought-iron grillwork than a nunnery window.[50] Eyes to the ground, he said, "I took the exam, I got my license, and by the sun that warms the wheatfields, I'll make mincemeat of anybody who insults all the good lads who teach swordsmanship."

I saw my chance and jumped between them to say that the man was not talking about him, so he had no cause to feel offended.

"Draw your sword, if you have one, and let's figure out who's the real swordsman, and leave the ladles out of it."

My poor companion opened his book and said loudly, "That's what this book says, and it was printed with the King's permission. And I'll testify that what it says is the truth, ladle or no ladle, here or anywhere. And if not, let's measure it." And he took out his compass and started saying, "This angle is obtuse . . ."

50. This character has the stereotypical clothes and looks of a "ruffian" of the era. Buff coats were thick, rough cowhide jackets that had replaced heavy steel armor by 1600.

Then the fencing teacher pulled his dagger and said, "I don't know who Angle is, or Obtuse either, and I've never heard of any such men in my life, but with this in my hand, I'll cut you to pieces."

He attacked the poor devil, who started running away, leaping around the house, saying, "You can't wound me! I'm presenting in profile!"

The innkeeper and I and the other people who were around got them to calm down, though I could hardly move from laughing.

They sent the good fellow to his bedroom, and me with him. Everybody in the inn had supper and went to sleep. Then at two in the morning, he gets up in his nightshirt and starts running around the bedroom in the dark, leaping and saying a thousand inanities in mathematical language. He woke me up, and as if that were not enough, he got the innkeeper to come down and light him a lamp, saying he had discovered an unblockable move through an arc-maneuvered thrust along the cord.

The innkeeper was beside himself with anger for being awakened, and was so upset at the man that he called him crazy. And with that, the fellow came over and told me that, if I wanted to get up, I could see the incredible move that he had discovered to counter the Turk and his scimitars. Then he said he wanted to go teach it to the King right away, because it was for the good of all Catholics.

By then it was dawn. We all got dressed, paid our bills, straightened things out between him and the fencing teacher, who departed saying that my companion's favorite book was alright but it produced more madmen than good fencers, because most people didn't understand it.

2

What Happened between Me and a Poet on the Road to Madrid

I went on my way to Madrid and the fencing teacher took leave of me to tread a different path. After he left, he came rushing back, calling out to me, and there in the middle of the countryside where no one could hear us, he whispered into my ear, "By your life, sir, please don't tell anyone the deep secrets I've revealed to you about the art of swordsmanship. Keep them to yourself. You're a man of good judgment."

I promised I would do that. He set off again, and I started laughing at his hilarious secret. Afterwards I traveled more than a league without running into anyone. I was riding along, thinking about the difficulties I faced in professing honor and virtue, because first I would have to cover up how little my parents had of either, then display so much myself that nobody would connect me with them. These thoughts of honor struck me as so fine that I congratulated myself on them. I told myself, "Since I've had nobody to learn virtue from or to emulate, I deserve more recognition for it than someone who inherited it from his grandparents."

In the midst of these debates and discussions, I ran into a very old cleric on a mule, bound for Madrid. We struck up a conversation, and he soon asked me where I was coming from. I told him, from Alcalá. "May God strike down all the awful people in that town," he said, "for there's not a man among them who has any sense."

I asked him how he could say such a thing about a town so full of learned men. In rising anger, he said, "Learned? I'll tell you how learned they are: for the past fourteen years I've been doing the carols for Corpus and Christmas in Majalahonda, where I've served as sexton, yet they've never given me the prize for the songs I've written. And so that you can see how senseless they are, I'll read you some, because I know you'll like them."[51]

Said and done: he unsheathed a string of pestilential poems, and from the first, which follows, you will know them all:

> Shepherds, don't the joke make you all misty?
> Today's the feast of Saint Corpus Christi!
> And it's the day we do our dancing,
> when the Lamb without stains
> takes so many pains
> to visit us as we are prancing
> and, among beatitudes advancing,
> to join us in our human guts.
> Play on, you lovely sackbuts!
> For therein does our joy consist-y.
> Shepherds, don't the joke make you all misty?

51. The people of this town (now called Majadahonda) ten miles northwest of Madrid were the butt of jokes about rustics. Church sextons, the assistants to parish priests, were targets of similar jokes.

And so forth.

"Could the inventor of jokes himself have done better?" he asked. "Just see how many mysteries are wrapped up in that one word, 'shepherds'! It took me more than a month to study it!"

I couldn't restrain my laughter, which was bubbling out through my eyes and nostrils, and with a huge guffaw, I said, "How wonderful! But let me just point out that you say 'Saint Corpus Christi,' though Corpus Christi isn't a saint. It's the day we celebrate the institution of the Holy Sacrament."

"That's a good one!" he replied with a mocking grin. "I'll show him to you on the calendar. He's canonized and everything, I'd stake my head on it!"

I couldn't argue with that, being overwhelmed with laughter at his utter ignorance. Instead, I said his verses deserved every prize in the book and that I'd never read anything so witty in my life.

"No?" he said at once. "Then listen to this, a short bit from a little book I've written in honor of the Eleven Thousand Virgins, for which I've composed fifty ottava rimas to each of them. It's very nice."

To get out of listening to so many millions of rhymes, I begged him not to read me anything on sacred themes. So he started reciting a comic play that had more scene changes than the journey to Jerusalem. He told me, "I finished it in two days, and this is the original copy."

It must have been half a ream of paper. The title was "Noah's Ark." All the characters were roosters, mice, donkeys, foxes, and boars, as in Aesop's fables. I praised him for the plot and the inventiveness, and he replied, "It's all my own, but nothing like it has ever been done before, and novelty's the main thing. If I can just get it staged, it'll be famous."

"How can it be staged," I asked, "if it calls for the actual animals, and they can't talk?"

"That's the difficulty. If it weren't for that, could anything be grander? But I've been thinking of rewriting it for parrots, blackbirds, and magpies, because they can talk, and using monkeys for the comic interludes."

"Well, that would certainly be grand."

"I've written other, even grander things," he said, "for a woman I love. And here I've got nine hundred and one sonnets and a dozen quatrains"—it sounded like he was measuring gallons by the ounce—"dedicated to my lady's legs."

I asked if he had seen them. He told me that he had not, because he had taken orders in the Church, but that the images were more in the way of prophecies. I confess the truth: though I found listening to him amusing, the thought of so many bad verses scared me, so I tried turning the conversation in other directions. I pointed to some rabbits I saw. "Well, I'll start with one in which I compare her legs to rabbits"—and off he went.

To distract him, I said, "Do you see that star, sir? A star you can see in the daytime!"

To this he said, "When I finish this, I'll recite my Thirtieth Sonnet for you, in which I call her 'my star.' You seem to know all the themes of these poems already."

I was so upset to find nothing I could mention that he had not written some inanity about that I was beside myself with joy when I saw we were getting to Madrid, for I expected him to hush up in embarrassment. But the opposite happened, for to show who he was, he raised his voice as we entered the city streets. I begged him to leave off, pointing out that if the children caught wind of a poet, there wasn't a vegetable in town that would fail to be flung in our direction, because poets were declared madmen in a proclamation against them, issued by a fellow who had once been one but had mended his ways. He asked me in some dismay to read it if I had it with me. I promised to do so at the inn. We went to the one where he usually stayed, and we met more than a dozen blind men at the door. Some recognized him by his scent, others by his voice. They gave him a hullabaloo of a welcome and he gave them each a hug. Then some started asking him for a "Just Judge" prayer in solemn and sententious verse, the sort that goes well with theatrical gestures. Others requested a prayer for the souls in Purgatory, and on they went in the same vein, each giving him eight *reales* as a deposit.

He bid them all farewell and said to me, "These blind men will bring in more than three hundred *reales* for me. So, with your permission, sir, I will excuse myself for a bit to write some of their prayers, and after our dinner we'll listen to that proclamation."

Oh wretched life! But none is more wretched than the lives of madmen who make their bread off the wretched themselves.

3

What I Did in Madrid and What Happened to Me on the Road to Cercedilla, Where I Spent the Night

The sexton withdrew for some time to study some heresies and stupidities for the blind men. After a while it was dinnertime. We ate, and then he asked me to read the proclamation. Since I had nothing else to do, I pulled it out and read it to him. I include it here because it seems sharp and perfectly suited to those whom it reprehends. It went like this:

> "Proclamation against Addled, Mawkish, and Vapid Poets."

This made the sexton laugh heartily, and he said, "You should have said so! My God, I thought it was going to be about me, but it's only against vapid poets."

It really tickled me to hear him say this, as if he were a fine white wine or a muscatel. I skipped the prologue and began with the first chapter, which went:

> "Whereas the species of vermin known as poets are our neighbors and Christians, albeit bad ones. And in view of the fact that throughout the year they worship eyebrows, teeth, ribbons, and shoes, and commit other and graver sins. Therefore we command that during Holy Week all public and streetwalking poets shall be gathered together, as is done with public women, and taught the error of their ways, and induced to repent. And to this end we do establish houses for the penitent.
>
> "And in view of the torrential heat caused by the dog-day, unsetting-sun verses of these poets, who shrivel like raisins from the stars and suns that they burn up in writing them, we condemn them to perpetual silence on the heavenly bodies, and we establish off-seasons like

those for hunting and fishing during which the Muses shall be prohibited in order that they not be driven into extinction through overuse.

"And whereas this infernal sect of men, condemned to life-long image-making, word-juggling, and phrase-inverting, has infected women with said poetizing ailment, we declare that we men consider ourselves repaid and avenged through this evil which we have done unto them for what woman did unto us by means of the apple at the world's beginning. And, given the poverty and destitution of the world in our day, we command that the poets' verses be burned like old embroidered fineries so as to extract the gold, silver, and pearls therein, for in most verses the poets form their ladies of such metals, like statues of Nebuchadnezzar."

At this point the sexton could not stand it any longer. Jumping to his feet, he said, "Oh, now they want to take away our livelihoods! Stop right there, sir, for I intend to go see the Pope about this, and I'll spend all the money I have. Fine thing if I, a man of the Church, should have to put up with this affront. I'll prove that a cleric-poet's verses aren't subject to any such proclamation, and I intend to go consult the authorities about this right away."

I rather felt like laughing, but I did not want to spend too long on this, because it was getting late, so I told him, "Sir, this proclamation is just for fun. It has no legal force or authority behind it."

"Oh, dear me!" he said, quite agitated. "You could have warned me and saved me all the worries in the world. Do you have any idea what it means to have eight hundred thousand poems on the books and then hear this? Please, keep reading, and may God pardon you for the scare you gave me."

I continued:

"And whereas, after they ceased to be Moors (though they still retain relics of that time), they became shepherds,[52] for which reason the sheep grew thin from drinking the poets' tears, singed by their burning passions, and so engrossed by their music that they stopped grazing, we command them to abandon that occupation. And we

52. Jabs at a passing fashion for poetry on "Moorish" themes, and at the pastoral or bucolic poetry that remained popular into the seventeenth century.

establish hermitages for those who prefer solitude, while the rest must seek employment as mule-drivers' boys, that being a proper occupation for jollity and dirty jokes."

"Some faggot cuckold buggaring Jew came up with that command!" he screamed. "And if I ever found out who it was, I'd write a satire that would make him and everybody who read it sorry they saw it. Wouldn't that be great, for a clean-shaven fellow like me to move in with the long-bearded hermits! Or for a chalicy, sextoning man to become a mule-driver's boy! These are terrifying plans, sir!"

"I've already told you, sir," I replied, "that they are jokes and you should hear them as such." I continued:

"FURTHERMORE, in order to put a stop to grand theft, we command that no verses be sent from Aragón to Castile or from Italy to Spain, under penalty of dressing decently for any poet who commits such an act, and of staying clean for one hour if he reoffends."

He found that one very funny, because the cassock he wore was gray-haired with age and so dirt-besplattered that you could have given him a proper burial merely by scraping the grime off and dumping it on top of him. His gown, you could have manured two fields with. And so, with a chuckle, I told him it also mandated:

"THEREFORE, women who fall in love with full-time poets are to be counted among the desperates who hang themselves or jump from cliffs, and who as such are denied burial in sacred ground. And in view of the bumper crop of roundelays, songs, and sonnets harvested in these recent fertile years, we command that any sheaves of paper deemed too worthless for wrapping fish shall be put to good use in the outhouses, without possibility of appeal."

And to finish up, I skipped to the last heading, which went like this:

"BUT OBSERVING, in our mercy, that three sorts of people in the republic are so utterly destitute they cannot live without such poets, to wit: comic actors, blind men, and sextons, we command that some practitioners of this art may be allowed, so long as they have been examined and

certified by the poet-chieftains of their territories, and with the following limitations: the poets for comic actors may not conclude their light entertainments with knock-abouts and devils, nor their comedies with weddings. And poets for blind men may not set their verses in Tetouan, and must banish the words "hath blest," "paramour," "whene'er," and "honor-bound." And when blind beggars say "this sonnet," they must not pronounce it "dishonest."[53] And poets for sextons must not use the names Gil or Pascual in their carols, nor commit wordplay, nor use revolving notions, the sort that come back holiday after holiday with just a change of names. And, finally, we command that all poets alike must discard Jove, Venus, Apollo, and the other gods, under penalty of having such gods as advocates in the hour of their death."

Everybody who heard the proclamation thought it was great, and they all asked me for copies. Only the good old sexton started swearing by the lives of Solemn Vespers, Introibo, and Kyries[54] that it was a satire aimed at him because of what it said about blind men, and that he knew better than anyone what had to be done. And, last of all, he said, "I'm a man who's been in the same inn as Liñán, and I've eaten with Espinel more than twice," and in Madrid he had stood as near to Lope de Vega as he was standing to me now, and he had seen Don Alonso de Ercilla a thousand times, and at home he had a portrait of "the divine Figueroa," and he had bought the breeches that Padilla stopped wearing when he became a friar, and he was wearing them today, and they were rags.[55] He showed them to us, and this gave everybody such a good laugh they did not want to leave the inn.

53. These three restrictions satirize, in turn: the tendency of beggars to claim that they were soldiers or captives (Tetouan, directly across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain, was a frequent site of military conflict); the stilted vocabulary of poets such as Quevedo's literary enemy, Luis de Góngora; and the mumbling pronunciation of many beggars. Near the end of the book, Pablos himself will violate most of these rules when he tries his hand at poetry.

54. Again the sexton shows his ignorance by taking the titles of prayers and sections of the Mass for saints.

55. The names he drops are those of famous Spanish poets of the era, some of them friends of Quevedo: Pedro Liñán de Riaza (c. 1560–1607), Vicente Espinel (1550–1624), Lope de Vega (1562–1635), Alonso de Ercilla (1533–1594), Francisco de Figueroa (1530–1588), and Pedro de Padilla (1540–1599; became a friar in 1585).

At last it was two and the road was calling, so we left Madrid. I bid the sexton farewell, though I felt sad to leave him, and turned towards the mountain pass to Segovia. As God wished it, to keep me from thinking bad thoughts, I ran into a soldier. We struck up a conversation right away. He asked me if I was coming from the Capital. I said I had passed through.

"It isn't worth more than that," he promptly said, "'cause it's a town for nasty people. I'd rather—I swear to Christ!—be under siege, snow to my waist, armed to the teeth, nothing to eat but wood, than put up with the impudent way they treat good, honest men there."

To this I replied that he should understand that you could find a bit of everything in the Capital, and that they held any man of fortune in great esteem there.

"Some esteem!" he said, very angry. "I was there for six months petitioning for a commission, after putting in twenty years of service spilling my blood for the King, as these wounds will tell you."

And he showed me a scar a good six inches long across his groin, which clear as day came from lancing a bubo.[56] Then he showed me two more on his heels that he said were bullet wounds, but from a pair of scars I have, I figured they were from chilblains. He took off his hat and showed me his size-sixteen face: that was how many stitches he sported from a knife wound that had split his nose. He had three more slash marks, turning his face into a line-crossed map.

"I got these," he said, "defending Paris,[57] serving God and King, on whose account my face is all sliced up, and all they gave me for it was fine words, which now are supposed to make up for foul deeds. Read these documents (by your honor's life!), for no man (I swear to Christ!) has ever emerged from battle (God almighty!) so distinguished."

And that was the truth, because he had plenty of distinguishing marks. He started taking out tin document tubes and showing me the papers they held, which must have belonged to whoever he stole his name from. I read them and said a thousand things to praise him, telling him El Cid and Bernardo had never done anything like him.[58]

56. A bubo is a lymph node swollen by a disease such as bubonic plague. In the past, bubos were commonly lanced and drained, a treatment now considered unsafe and unnecessary.

57. The Spanish army lifted the Huguenot siege of Paris in September 1590.

58. El Cid (c. 1043–1099) and Bernardo del Carpio (a legendary character) figured in many poems and romances as great Spanish military heroes from the distant past.

At this he jumped up and said, "What! Like me? I swear to God! Not even García de Paredes or Julián Romero or any other honest men did.[59] Devil be damned! Back then they didn't have any artillery, and, I swear to God! Bernardo wouldn't have lasted an hour under fire. Go to Flanders and ask about the deeds of Gaptooth, sir, and you'll see what they tell you."

"Would Gaptooth be you, sir?" I asked.

And he replied, "Who else! Can't you see I'm missing a tooth right here? But let's change topics—it doesn't sound nice for a fellow to heap praise on himself."

As we walked along talking about these things, we ran into a hermit riding a donkey, his beard so long it dragged in the mud, gaunt and dressed in sackcloth. We greeted him with the customary *Deo gratias*, and he began to praise the wheat growing in the fields and the Lord's mercy it manifested.

The soldier jumped up and said, "Oh, Father! I've seen pikes aimed thicker at me than these wheat stalks, and, I swear to Christ! I did all I could in the sack of Antwerp,[60] I swear to God I did!"

The hermit scolded him for swearing so much. The soldier replied, "It's easy to see, Father, that you've never been a soldier, because you're scolding me for doing my job."

It made me laugh out loud to hear what he thought it meant to go soldiering, and I realized that he must be a good-for-nothing chicken, because there is no custom that high-ranking soldiers, if not all soldiers, detest so much as swearing. The hermit asked him, "So, where did you leave the sack of Antwerp? The sack you're carrying looks like it came from Las Navas.[61] I'm sure one from Antwerp wouldn't be so worn out." The soldier laughed long and hard at the question, and the hermit at the soldier's worn gear.

We reached the foot of the mountains, the hermit reciting the rosary on a load of firewood turned into rosary beads, so that each Ave Maria was punctuated with the clatter of bowling pins. The soldier

59. Diego García de Paredes (1466–1534) and Julián Romero (1518–1577) were common soldiers who achieved wide recognition for their daring military feats and decades of service in the Spanish army.

60. From November 4th to 7th, 1576, unpaid Spanish troops fighting in Flanders mutinied and looted Antwerp, killing thousands of civilians, nearly destroying the city, and definitively uniting the Low Countries against Spanish rule. This is a curious battle for a soldier to highlight as a sign of military prowess.

61. The battle of Las Navas took place in 1212.

went along comparing the mountain peaks to the castles he had seen and deciding which were the strongest positions and where the artillery should be placed. I went along looking at them both, as much in fear of the hermit's oversized rosary with its humongous beads as of the soldier's lies.

"Well, I'd blow up half this pass with powder," he said. "Do some good work, improve it for travelers."

In these and other conversations we reached Cercedilla. All three of us entered the inn together, night having fallen. We had them prepare a supper for us (it was a Friday), and while we were waiting the hermit said, "Let's entertain ourselves a while, for idleness is the mother of vice. We'll play for Ave Marias."

And he pulled a pack of cards from his sleeve. I had to laugh when I saw that, thinking about his rosary. The soldier said, "No, let's play for up to a hundred *reales*—that's how much I have."

Greedy, I said I would bet a hundred of my own. The hermit, not to let us down, agreed and said he was carrying the lamp-oil money, maybe two hundred *reales*. I confess I was planning to be his owl and drink up his oil,[62] but all the Turk's plans should go so far awry.

The game was parar,[63] and the good part was that the hermit said he did not know how to play, so he had us teach him. The blessed soul let us take two hands, then he promptly took his hand to us and swept the table clean. He inherited all we had while we were still alive. The thief swept his winnings aside so fast with the butt of his hand, it was a pity to see. He would lose a simple hand, then win a dozen mean ones. At every deal the soldier would blurt a dozen *I swears* and another dozen *dang its*, wrapped up in *by the life of*'s. I was biting my nails, while the friar was grabbing my coins with his. I left no saint uninvoked. The cards we bet on were like the Messiah, for they never turned up and just kept us waiting. He scalped us good. We wanted to bet the clothes off our backs, but after he won my six hundred *reales*, which was all I had, and the soldier's hundred, he said it was all for fun and we were his fellow men, so there was no need to keep going.

62. There was a general belief that the *lechuza* (barn owl) drank lamp oil. *Lechuza* was also slang for "night burglar."

63. In parar, the Spanish version of the old card game lansquenet and a forerunner of faro and monte, the dealer bet against the other players over which card would turn up next. Notoriously easy to fix, it was the favorite game of swindlers and card-sharps.

"You shouldn't swear," he said. "Look at me: I commended myself to God, so I came out fine."

And since we did not know how much skill he had from fingertips to wrist, we believed him. The soldier swore he would never swear again, and I swore after him. "Gosh dang it!" said the poor lieutenant (he told me that was his rank), "I've been surrounded by Lutherans and Moors, but I've never been looted like this."

The hermit laughed it all off. He went back to praying on his rosary beads. Since I did not have a penny to my name, I asked him to give me enough for supper and to pay the lodging to Segovia for the two of us who were going there stone-broke. He promised to do so. He scarfed down sixty eggs—I've never seen such a thing!—and said he was going to bed. We were all sleeping in an open hall with others who were staying there, as the bedrooms were already taken. I was feeling very sad when I went to bed. The soldier called over the innkeeper and gave him his documents in their tin cans for safekeeping, along with a bundle of shirts that had reached retirement age. We all lay down. The Father crossed himself; we made the sign of the cross at him. He slept; I stayed awake, scheming how to take his money; the soldier talked in his sleep about his hundred *reales*, as if they were not beyond recovery.

Time came to get up. I asked for a lamp, quick. They brought it, and the innkeeper brought the soldier his bundle but forgot to bring his cans of documents. The poor Lieutenant flooded the house with yells, demanding the cans. This alarmed the innkeeper, and since we were all telling him to bring the cans he ran off and brought back three chamberpots, saying, "Here's one for each of you. Will you be needing any more cans?" For he understood that we had gotten the runs.

Here it was that soldier jumped up, drew his sword, and chased after the innkeeper, in his nightshirt, swearing he would kill him for making fun of him—a soldier who had been at Lepanto, St. Quentin,[64] and other battles—by bringing him chamberpots instead of the cans he had left in his care. We all ran after him to restrain him, but we could not. The innkeeper said, "But sir, you asked for cans! How was I supposed to know that 'cans' is soldier talk for your documents about your deeds?"

We calmed them both down and returned to the room. The hermit, suspicious, stayed in bed, saying the sudden fright had made him ill. He paid our bill for us, and we left the town to make for the mountain

64. Spain beat the French at St. Quentin (northern France) in 1557 and the Ottomans at Lepanto (Gulf of Corinth, Greece) in 1571. The soldier's claim to have been at both the land and the sea victories is meant to sound ludicrous.

pass, angry at the way the hermit had ended it, and angry we had not managed to take his money.

We ran into a Genoese—I mean, one of those antichrists of Spanish currency—who was heading for the pass with a page behind him and a parasol over his head, very à la moneybags. We struck up a conversation with him, and he reduced everything to its value in maravedís, because those people are naturally born for counting cash. He started talking about Besançon, and whether it was a good idea or not to send money to Besançon, and on and on until the soldier and I asked who it was that he kept talking about. To this he replied with a laugh, "It's a town in Italy where all the businessmen—the men they call pen-pushing swindlers here—gather to set the prices that govern currency."[65]

From this we gathered that Besançon was where the maestros of predation call the tunes. He entertained us on the road by telling us how he was ruined because a bank where he had invested more than sixty thousand ducats had failed. He swore on his own conscience that it was true—though I think that a merchant's conscience is like a streetwalker's virginity, up for sale whether it exists or not. Hardly anyone in his line of work has a conscience, because they heard that your conscience will nag you over just about anything, so they started discarding theirs with the umbilical cord at birth.

While chatting this way, we caught sight of the walls of Segovia, and my eyes rejoiced despite my memories of what happened with Cabra, which dimmed my happiness. I reached the town and at its entrance I saw my father on the road, waiting to be carted off in moneybags (having been turned into quarters) to Josaphat.[66] I was moved to pity. And I entered the city looking rather different than when I had left, with a trimmed beard, well dressed.

I left the company. As I pondered who in town might best know my uncle (apart from the gallows), I could not come up with anyone who could give me a hand. I approached many people, asking for Alonso

65. Genoese bankers had been the main financiers of the Spanish crown since the 1570s. Pablos calls them the "antichrists" of Spanish currency for their role in its devaluation. A group of major bankers met at the quarterly Besançon fairs to set the currency exchange rates for Western Europe. Founded in 1535 in Besançon (a French town then under Spanish rule), the Besançon fairs were moved to the Italian town of Piacenza in 1579 by the powerful Genoese bankers who controlled them. See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), v. 1, pp. 380 and 505–507.

66. The Valley of Josaphat or Jehoshaphat is to be the site of the Last Judgment according to an interpretation of Joel 3:12 favored by Quevedo.

Ramplón, but no one could tell me his address, saying they did not know him. I was delighted to find so many upstanding gentlemen in my town. But just then I heard the hangman's harbinger giving full throat to his harangue, and my uncle giving full swing to his lash. Along came a procession of men stripped of shirts and hats, followed by my uncle making a fine show of the lash, playing a procession march on the backs of those five lutes, but with whips for strings. I was watching this with a man who had said, when I asked for my uncle, that I looked like a grand gentleman. Then comes my good uncle and, casting his eyes on me as he passed nearby, he rushed up to embrace me, calling me nephew. I thought I would die of embarrassment. I did not turn around to say good-bye to the man I had been talking to. I went off with my uncle, and he told me, "You can come along while I finish up with these fellows, since we're almost done, and today you'll have dinner with me."

Since I was on horseback and, if I joined the parade, would look like little less than one of the whipped myself, I said I would wait for him where I was. And so I stepped aside, so shamed that, if collecting my inheritance had not depended on him, I would never have spoken to him again nor let myself be seen with him in public. He finished practicing his chords on their backs, returned, and brought me to his house, where I dismounted, and we ate.

4

My Uncle's Lodgings and Visitors, Collecting My Inheritance, and My Return to the Capital

My good uncle had his lodgings in the house of a water seller, next door to the slaughterhouse. We entered and he said, "It isn't the Alcázar,[67] but I assure you, nephew, the old place is perfect for me to do my business."

67. The Alcázar is the great castle that dominates the city of Segovia.

We climbed the steps. I was just wondering what was waiting for me at the top, and how, if at all, it would differ from the gallows. We entered a bedroom with a ceiling so low we had to bend our heads as if for a blessing as we walked. He hung the whip on a nail in the wall, next to other nails from which hung scourges, lashes, knives, meat-hooks, and other tools of the trade. He asked me why I didn't take off my academic gown and sit down. I said it wasn't my custom. God knew how I was feeling when I saw my uncle's ignominy. He told me I had been lucky to run into him on a good occasion, because I would get a good dinner, and he had invited some friends over. Just then the door opened and in came one of the beggars who collect money for the souls in Purgatory, in a violet tunic down to his feet.[68] Jingling the coins in his box, he said, "Hey, I made as much off the blessed souls today as you did off the convicts. Slap five!"

They slapped and pinched each other's cheeks. The soulless soulster tucked up his tunic, revealing bandy legs in linen breeches, and started dancing and asking whether Clemente was there yet. My uncle said no, but just then, Glory be, wrapped in rags and wearing wooden shoes, in came a pig piper.[69] I mean, a swineherd. I could tell what he was by the, excuse me, horn he carried in his hand, though he properly should have worn it on his head. He greeted us in his own way, and in after him came a left-handed, cross-eyed mulatto wearing a hat with a brim broader than a valley and a crown taller than an oak, a sword with a cross-guard bigger than the King's guard, and a buff coat. He had a face embroidered with the stitches from his many knife scars. He came in and sat down, greeting everyone, and he said to me and my uncle, "I swear, Alonso, you really made old Nip-Nose and Snatch-Claw pay for their crimes."

The soulman jumped in and said, "When I was in Ocaña I had to give Arrowhead, the hangman there, four ducats so he would goad the donkey into moving faster, and so he'd use the smaller whip to slap me."

"Lord Almighty!" said the deputy. "I sure overpaid Big Juan in Murcia, 'cause he let the donkey plod along like a turtle, and the rascal laid into me so hard, all I got from it was welts."

And the swineherd, with a shrug, said, "My back still has its virginity intact."

"Every hog has his day," said the beggar.

68. Authorized beggars wore purple tunics.

69. Literally, "a piper of acorns," because he led pigs through the forests around the town to forage on acorns and oak leaves, herding them by piping on a horn. Pablos adds the obligatory joke about the horn, conventional sign of cuckoldry.

"I can hold my head high among all the strap-handlers," said my good uncle, "'cause when anybody gives me a job, I do what I'm paid for. Those guys today gave me sixty, and they got a nice, friendly whipping for it, with the smaller lash."

When I saw how honorable the people my uncle was speaking to were, I admit I blushed until I could not hide my shame. The deputy noticed. "Is this the priest? The one they punished the other day, got a few wallops on his flipside?"

I said I was not the sort of man to get punished like them. At this, my uncle stood up and said, "This is my nephew, a prof at Alcalá, real distinguished."

They begged my pardon and were as nice as could be to me. I was chafing to eat dinner, collect my inheritance, and flee my uncle. They set the tables, then they lowered a hat by rope, the way prisoners in jail do to collect alms, and hauled food up from an inn in back of the house, which was served in scraps of bowls and vestiges of cups and crockery. It would be impossible to exaggerate my sense of embarrassment and affront. They sat to dine, the beggar at the head of the table and the others every which way. I do not want to say what we ate, only that it was all in the form of stiff drink. The deputy slurped down three reds. Offering me a toast, the swineherd grabbed it before it got away, downing more toasts than the rest of us together could make. Water was not even a memory, much less the desire to drink it.

Five of the potpies they sell for quarters appeared on the table. They lifted the crusts and sprinkled the pies with holy water while everyone said a prayer for the dead, *Requiem aeternam* and all, for the soul of the deceased whose flesh lay within. My uncle said, "You'll recall, nephew, what I wrote to you about your father."

It came back to me. They all ate, but I made do with just the crust, and that became my custom. And so now, whenever I eat potpies, I recite an Ave Maria for whoever's soul rests with God.

A pair of wine jugs were constantly refilled, and the deputy and the soulman drank enough to put their own souls in such a state that, when they brought up a plate of sausages that looked like blackened fingers, one of them asked why they were roasting burnt firecrackers. By then my uncle was in such a state that, reaching out to grab a sausage, he said, in a hoarse and rasping voice, one eye half-closed and the other watery with wine, "Nephew, by the bread God made in His image and likeness, I've never had better red meat in my life."

As for me, when I saw the deputy reaching for the salt cellar and saying, "This soup's hot," and the swineherd grabbing a whole fistful

of salt, saying, "A little salty snack is great when you're drinking," and tossing it all straight into his mouth, I was torn between laughter and rage.

They brought soup, and the soulman picked up a bowl with both hands, saying, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." He tried to put it to his mouth to slurp it, but he hit his cheek instead, spilling it all, burning himself with the soup, and making himself an embarrassing mess from head to foot. When he saw what he had done to himself, he tried to get up, but since his head had gotten pretty heavy, he steadied himself on the table, which was a rickety tray. He upset it and spilled food all over everyone, and on top of that he said the swineherd had pushed him. When the swineherd saw the beggar falling onto him, he got up, raised his instrument, and horn-whacked the beggar with it. They got locked in a fistfight, the beggar bit the swineherd on the cheek, and after all their tumbling and commotion the swineherd vomited everything he had eaten into the begster's beard. My uncle, who was more clearheaded than the rest, asked who had let in so many priests. When I saw that everyone was, put simply, seeing double, I pacified the squabble, unlocked the fighters, and helped the deputy up off the floor, where he had been weeping inconsolably. I got my uncle, who was bowing to a tall wooden candlestick of his, thinking it was one of the guests, and led him to bed. I took the horn away from the swineherd, but there was no way to get him to shut up, though all the others were sleeping. He kept demanding his horn, because there had never been anybody who could play more tunes on it than he could, so he had to play the pipe. In the end, I did not go away until I was sure they were all asleep.

I left the house and entertained myself by revisiting my hometown all afternoon. I walked past Cabra's house and heard the news that he had died but did not bother asking what of, for I know that hunger exists in this world. I came back home at night, after four hours had passed, and found one of them awake and crawling around the room on hands and knees, looking for the door and saying that they had misplaced the house. I picked him up and let the others keep sleeping until eleven at night. They woke up then, and my uncle, stretching and yawning, asked what time it was. The swineherd, who had not slept it off yet, replied that it was just siesta time, and that it was stifling hot. The beggar asked, as best he could, for his collection box: "The souls have had plenty of time off, being as they're supposed to be supporting me." But instead of going to the door, he went to the window, and when he saw the stars out he started shouting to the others that the

sky was full of stars at midday and that there had been a huge eclipse. They all crossed themselves and kissed the ground. It scandalized me to see what a rascal the beggar was, and I resolved to stay away from men like him. The vile, despicable actions that I was seeing made the desire grow within me, moment by moment, to live among illustrious people and gentlemen. I sent them all away one by one, as best I could, and put my uncle, who if not drunk as a skunk was drunk as a polecat, to bed, and then made myself comfortable on a bed of my own clothes and the garments that I found there, God rest their former owners.[70]

We spent the night in this way, and next morning I spoke with my uncle about tallying up my inheritance and turning it over to me right away. He woke up saying he was beat and he did not know why. Between the tosspots' upchuck and the water they had made without drinking any, they had turned the bedroom into a tavern of secondhand wine. My uncle stretched a leg and got up. We discussed my business at length, which was a lot of work for me, he being such a drunk and rustic man. In the end I talked him into letting me know about part but not all of my estate, and so he told me about some three hundred ducats that my good father had earned with his own hands, which he had left in the care of a good woman under whose protection thefts occurred for ten leagues in every direction.

Not to tire you, sir, I will say only that I collected and pocketed my money, which my uncle had neither spent nor drunk up, which was quite something from a man of so little sense, for he thought it would be enough for me to graduate and be lifted up to cardinal—and since he regularly lifted up men's heads and turned their backs red as cardinals, he did not find this notion difficult. He told me, when he saw I had collected it, "Pablos, son, it'll be your own fault if you don't prosper and make good, since you've had someone to learn from. You have money. I'll never let you down, and whatever I'm worth and whatever I have, I want it to be for you."

I thanked him heartily for the offer. We spent the day chatting about nonsense and paying visits to the characters described above. The swineherd, the beggar, and my uncle spent the afternoon playing knucklebones.[71] The beggar bet his Mass money like nothing. It was a sight to see how they juggled the knucklebone: the thrower would

70. Hangmen were allowed to keep the clothing of executed prisoners (Cabo Aseguinolaza 2011: 89).

71. The game (*taba* in Spanish) consists of tossing a sheep's ankle bone and betting on which side will land up.

catch it in midair on his wrist, rock it back and forth, and toss it again. Knucklebones served as well as a card game for collecting donations to support the wine jug, which was always at their side.

Night fell; they left; my uncle and I lay down, each in our own bed, for he had supplied me with a mattress. Day broke and, before he could wake, I rose and left for a lodging house without disturbing him. I locked his door from the outside and dropped the key through a hole in the wall. As I said, I went to an inn to hide out and wait for a convenient opportunity to go to the Capital. I left a sealed letter for my uncle in his room telling him that I was leaving and why, and letting him know he should not go looking for me, because I was never, ever to see him again.

5

My Flight from Segovia and What Happened on the Way to the Capital

That very morning a muledriver was heading from the inn with a load of freight bound for the Capital. He had a donkey; he rented it to me. I went outside to wait by the door in front of the building. He came out. I seated myself on my ride and began my journey. I rode along thinking to myself, "So much for you, you rascally, honor-staining gibbet jockey." I was thinking about how I was heading for the Capital, where no one knew me—that was what brought me the most comfort—and where I would have to make my own way by my own abilities. I resolved to hang up my academic gown when I got there and get short clothes in today's fashion. But let us return to the things my uncle did, offended by my letter, which went as follows:

> To Alonso Ramplón.
> Dear Sir:
> Now that God has done me such notable favors as removing my good father from before me and sending my mother to Toledo, where she will reside until she is

> fired, the only thing left for me is to see done unto you, Sir, as you have done unto others. I intend to become one of my family's illustrious members. I cannot become two, unless, that is, I fall into your hands and am carved up as others have been. Do not inquire after me, for it is in my interest to deny the blood we share. Serve the King, and good-bye.

There is no need to exaggerate the blasphemies and slurs he must have heaped on me.

Let us return to my trip. I was riding horseback on the dapple-gray of La Mancha,[72] and hoping very much not to run into anyone, when from afar I saw a nobleman walking my way at a fast clip. He wore his cape, a belted sword, straight-laced breeches, and boots, and he looked well-off in his ruffled collar and jauntily angled hat. I suspected he was a gentleman who had left his coach behind, and so, pulling even, I greeted him. He looked at me and said, "You must travel more comfortably on that little donkey, professor, than I do with all my pomp."

Taking him to mean the coach and servants he had left behind, I said, "Very true, sir. I find it more pleasant to ride on this than in a coach, for even if you travel with more repose in the one you left back there, there's always the worry that it might overturn."

"What coach? Back where?" he asked, quite unsettled.

And he turned so energetically to look behind him that his breeches fell down when the single lace holding them up broke, and it was so lonesome a lace that (after seeing me double over with laughter at the sight) he asked me to lend him another. When I saw he only had a scrap of undershirt, which left his hind eye peeking out, I said, "By God, sir, if you won't wait for your servants, I can't help you, because I only have one lace myself."

"If you are trying to make a joke," he said, holding up his breeches with one hand, "just leave, because I don't know what you're talking about when you say 'servants.'"

This revealed to me so thoroughly just how poor he was that, after we had traveled on for half a league, he admitted that if I did not do

72. Most critics see this as a reference to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (first published in 1605), in which Sancho Panza rides a donkey that he calls his "dapple-gray," a term usually reserved for horses. The Spanish for "riding horseback," *ir caballero*, echoes both Don Quixote's fantasy of being a knight and Pablos' desire to circulate among gentlemen; *caballero* means knight, gentleman, and horse rider.

him the favor of letting him ride the donkey he would not be able to make it to the Capital, since he was worn out from having to hold his pants up with his hands while he walked. Moved to compassion, I alighted and, since he could not let go of his breeches, I had to lift him up. And I was shocked by what my sense of touch discovered, because on his hinder parts, which were covered by his cape, the slashings in his breeches displayed a lining of pure backside. He sensed that I had noticed and discreetly anticipated me by saying, "Professor, all that glitters is not gold. When you saw my ruffled collar and stately mien, you must have thought I was an earl from ballads of yore. How good these thin crusts are in this world for covering up what you have just touched!"

I said I assured him that he had convinced me things were quite different from what I had first seen.

"Well, you haven't seen anything yet," he replied, "for you can see everything there is about me, since I conceal nothing. Here you see me, a full-blown hidalgo from a noble family in the northern mountains, and if only my nobility maintained me as much as I maintain my nobility, there'd be nothing more you could ask for.[73] But, professor, if you don't have bread and meat you can't maintain good blood—and by God's mercy, everyone's blood is red—and you can't be a man of substance if your assets are insubstantial. I learned the real truth about writs of hidalgo status one day when I happened not to have eaten, and at a tavern they refused to pawn mine for two slices of ham. Because it wasn't written with gold letters! But you'd be better off using gold to coat pills than to write letters, and they do a person more good. And anyway, hardly anybody uses gold letters. I've even sold my own tomb, so I don't have anywhere to fall dead, because my father's estate—he was called Toribio Rodríguez Vallejo Gómez de Ampuero, all those names belonged to him—got used for a security deposit and was lost. The title of *Don* is all I have left to sell, and I've been so unlucky I haven't found anybody who needs it, since whoever doesn't have *Don* for an appetizer has it for dessert, as in *pardon, cordon, abandon, undone*, and others of that ilk."

73. The Cantabrian mountains were the only part of Castile never conquered by the Moors, so claiming to have origins in "the mountains" became a basic argument for proving hidalgo status in court. "The 'mountains' was a kind of code word for a heritage untarnished by Jewish or Moorish connections" (Ruiz 2001: 77). The speaker here, who soon reveals his name to be Don Toribio, owns a writ of hidalgo status but little else.

I admit that the hidalgo's misadventures, mingled though they were with laughter, moved me to compassion. I asked him what his name was and where he was going and why. He said he had all his father's names: Don Toribio Rodríguez Vallejo Gómez de Ampuero y Jordán. No other name had ever rung so hollow, for it ended with *dan* and started with *don*, like the clang of a clapper. He next said he was going to the Capital because a threadbare firstborn son like him begins to stink after two days in a small town where he has no way to maintain himself, so he was going to the common homeland where everyone ends up and where venturesome stomachs find open banquets. "And when I go there, I never fail to find a hundred *reales* in my purse, a bed, food to eat, and some invigorating illicit pleasure, for in the Capital a sharp wit is the philosopher's stone, turning everything it touches into gold."

I saw clear skies ahead. By way of entertainment on the road, I begged him to tell me how and where people like him who have nothing live in the Capital, for it seemed to me a hard job these days, when people are not content with just their own stuff but even ask others for theirs.

"There's plenty of those, son, but plenty of the other sort, too. Flattery's the master key. It'll open any heart in any town. But so you won't find what I'm saying too hard to believe, listen to my deeds and my schemes, and all your doubts will be allayed."

6

In Which the Hidalgo Continues the Journey and the Promised Tale of His Life and Customs

"First off, you should know that in the Capital you'll always find the stupidest and the wisest, the richest and the poorest, and the extremes of everything. It cloaks the wicked and hides the good. You'll find certain sorts of folks there, such as myself, about whom no one knows where or how or from what stock they descend. We have

different names to distinguish among ourselves. Some of us call ourselves vapid gentlemen; others, mawkish, bogus, addled, thin-bellied, or dog-hungry.

"Our only mentors are our own wits. We spend most of our time on empty stomachs, because it's hard work to get food from other men's hands. We are the nightmares of banquets, the locusts of cheap taverns, the cankers of stewpots, and like it or not, we wheedle invitations for ourselves. We support ourselves like that, on air, and we're content. We're folks who eat an onion and make like it's a capon. If somebody comes to visit us at home, he'll find our rooms full of chicken and mutton bones, fruit peels, the door blocked by piles of feathers and rabbit skins—all stuff we've collected around town by night in order to honor ourselves with it by day. We'll be grumbling, when the guest walks in, 'How is it possible that I can't get that girl to sweep all this up? Please excuse the mess, sir. It's just that some friends ate over last night, and, you know, these servants . . . ,' et cetera. Anybody who doesn't know us will think it's true, and the mess passes for a banquet.

"So what can I say about the way we eat at other people's houses? After talking to someone for half a minute, we know his address, and we'll drop by to visit when it just happens to be chow time—and we'll make sure that dinner is on the table when we show up. We tell him it was our devotion to him that brought us, because we have never met anyone so intelligent before, and so on. If he asks whether we've had dinner, then, if they haven't started yet, we say no. If they invite us, we don't wait to be asked a second time, since we know that a short hesitation can turn into a long fast. If they've already started, we say we just ate. But even if he's great at carving the fowl or bread or whatever, to create an opportunity for scarfing down a bite we'll say, 'Now allow me, sir, to serve as your master butler, because so-and-so (and we drop the name of some dead duke or count), may he rest in peace, used to love watching me carve even more than eating.' While saying this, we grab the knife and start to carve servings, and finally we say, 'Oh, it smells so delicious! I'd be doing the cook a disservice if I didn't try it. What a hand for cooking she has!' Said and done. Try a little of this, and a little of that, and there goes half the platter: the turnip because it's a turnip, the bacon because it's bacon, and everything because it is what it is.

"When that fails us, we can still make a date with some monastery's soup kitchen. We'll eat their beggars' soup in secret, not in public, and we'll lead the friars to believe we're doing it from piety, not from need.

"It is a sight to see one of us at a gambling house: how attentively he fetches candles or snuffs them, carries chamberpots, how he shuffles

cards and compliments the witty sayings of the guy who's winning, all to get one sorry *real* as a tip.

"As for clothing ourselves, we have the whole street of used clothes vendors memorized. And just as some places have set times for prayer, so do we for mending. It's something to see the variety of things we fix up: for, as much as we hate the sun (since it reveals all our patches, darning, and rags), we stand in it every morning with our legs outspread, and we scrutinize our shadows on the ground to discover any loose shreds or tatters around the crotch. Then we use a pair of scissors to trim our breeches' beards. And since the crotch is always the first to go, it's something to see how we cut slashings from the backs of our breeches to resettle the front regions. We usually end up with the whole rear so peaceful (for lack of slashings) that there's nothing left there but the pure baize lining. Only our cloaks know for sure—and we avoid windy days and climbing onto ladders or horses. We study how to position ourselves in the daylight. On clear days, we keep our legs tight together, and when we bow to someone, we bend only at the ankles, because spreading our knees would let people see our ventilation.

"There's nothing covering our bodies that didn't start out as something else and doesn't have a history. E.g., take a look at this vest: it started off as breeches, the granddaughter of a cape and great-granddaughter of a greatcloak, which it was in its beginnings, and now I expect it to move on and become stocking liners and many other things. These socks started out as handkerchiefs, having been towels earlier, and undershirts before that, the daughters of bedsheets. And after this, we use them to make rag paper, which we write on, and afterwards we turn the paper into papier-mâché for reviving our shoes, which I've seen given up for dead and then miraculously cured through such medicine.

"So, what can I say about the way in which we steer clear of lights at night so that no one will see our bald cloaks and clean-shaven vests? They don't have any more peach fuzz on them than a cobblestone, since it has been God's will to give us all our whiskers on our chins and take them away from our capes. But to save on barbers, we're always sure to wait until another one of us also needs a haircut, and then we do each other's hair, just as the Gospel says: 'Help each other like good brothers.'

"And we're careful not to go around to each other's houses, when we learn that one of us is working on the same people as someone else. You should see how jealous our stomachs get.

"We're obliged to ride horseback once a month, even if it means being ridden on a donkey through the public streets, and to ride in a coach once a year, even if it means hitching a ride with the luggage or sitting on the back. But if we ever do ride inside the coach, note that it's always in the window seat, sticking our long necks out the window, bowing and saluting so everybody will see us and talking to friends and acquaintances even if they look away.

"If fleas bite us when we're around ladies, we have tricks to scratch ourselves without being seen. If it's on the thigh, we tell a story about how we saw a soldier marching from this place to that, and we point to the spots that are itching, scratching ourselves instead of showing them. If we're in church and our chests itch, we do the Sanctus even if the priest is still at the Introibo.[74] We get up and, finding a quiet corner where we can pretend we are stretching to catch sight of something, we scratch ourselves.

"What can I say about lying? You'll never find the truth on our lips. We name-drop dukes and counts in our conversations, some as friends, others as kin. And we make sure that the nobles we mention are either dead or very far away.

"And what's most remarkable: we never fall in love unless there's lucre in it, for our order prohibits coy ladies no matter how lovely they are.[75] So we're always wooing the women: the tavern lady for food, the landlady for the rent, the collar lady for the ruffled ones we wear. And even though it's impossible to satisfy so many women when you're eating as little and drinking as badly as we do, when her turn comes each one is content.

"How would anybody who sees these boots of mine guess that they're riding bareback on my legs, without an intervening sock or stocking? And why should anyone who sees this collar imagine that I don't have a shirt? A gentleman can do without all that stuff, professor. But without a well-starched ruffled collar? No. For one thing, it's a fine adornment for a gentleman; and after you turn it around, you can make a supper of the starch in it if you suck on it right.

"And to sum it up, professor, gentlemen like us miss our meals more consistently than women nine months pregnant miss their periods, and

74. At the Sanctus prayer, in the middle of the service, members of the congregation lightly strike their chests three times. The Introibo is at the very beginning of the Mass.

75. Here and elsewhere, the beggars of Madrid are jokingly treated as a religious order with a strict set of rules, like the Franciscans or Dominicans.

that's life in the Capital: one day you're prospering and flush with cash, next day you're in the poorhouse. But you know, it's a life, and if you can shift for yourself you're king no matter how little you have."

I enjoyed the hidalgo's strange way of life so much and was so amused that, entertained by these and other conversations, I reached Las Rozas on foot, and there we spent the night.[76] The hidalgo had supper with me. He did not have a penny, but I was obliged to him for his advice, which had opened my eyes to many things and inspired me to follow a life of vapidry. I declared my plans to him before we went to sleep. He embraced me a thousand times, saying he had always hoped his arguments would make an impression on a man of such good judgment. He offered to do me the favor when we got to the Capital of introducing me to our brothers in the big con and letting me stay with everyone. I accepted, without declaring to him all the ducats I was carrying, but only one hundred *reales*—and that, together with the good deeds I had done him, was enough to oblige him to friendship with me.

I bought three laces from the innkeeper, he laced up his breeches, we slept that night, got up early, and tumbled headlong down into Madrid.

76. Las Rozas is a small town twelve miles northwest of Madrid.

BOOK THREE

1

What Happened to Me in the Capital, from My Arrival until Nightfall

We entered the Capital at ten in the morning. We stopped, as agreed, at the house of Don Toribio's friends. He went to the door and knocked. It was opened by an old lady dressed in poor rags, face like a walnut shell, time-nibbled features, laden with back pains and years. He asked after his friends. She replied in a shrill voice that they were out grifting. We remained alone until twelve, passing the time, he by enticing me to take up the scammer's life, and I by absorbing all I could.

At half past twelve, in walked a specter wrapped in baize robes draped down to his feet, shabbier than his sense of shame. The two talked together in beggars' cant, the upshot of which was that he gave me a hug and welcomed me in. We talked for a while, then he pulled out a glove that held sixteen *reales* and the letter he had used to collect them, saying it was a license to beg on behalf of a poor woman. He emptied the glove, took out a second one, and held the pair doubled over in his hand the way doctors do. I asked him why he did not pull them on. He said it was because they were both for the same hand, a trick used to make it look like he owned a pair.

All the while I noticed that he never unwrapped. Being a greenhorn, I asked him why he kept his cloak on, to which he responded, "Son, there's a long rip down the back of my cassock, along with a thin flannel patch and an oil stain. This bit of wrap covers it all up, and this way one gets around."

He took off his cloak and I saw a large bulge under his cassock. I thought it was his breeches, because that was what it looked like, but when he lifted his cassock to start picking the fleas off of it, I saw it

was a couple of cardboard disks that he had tied to his waist and fitted around each thigh in such a way that you could see their shapes under his mourning robes. For he wore no undershirt, no leggings, and hardly anything to pick fleas from, he was so nearly naked. He went into the flea-picking room and turned over a sign that said, "Occupied," like the ones they use in vestries, so that nobody else would come in. I gave great thanks to God when I saw how much He gave men when He gave them cunning, if He was going to deprive them of wealth.

"I've returned from my trip sick in the leggings," said my good friend, "so I'll have to go to my room to mend." He asked if there were any scraps of cloth, but the old woman, who went out twice a week to collect rags like the women who work for paper mills, said there were not any, adding that for lack of rags Don Lorenzo Íñiguez del Pedroso had been laid up in bed for two weeks with a vest-ache.

As we were talking about this, in came a fellow dressed as a letter-carrier, with riding boots, a gray suit, and a hat with the brim turned up and fastened on either side. He learned about my arrival from the others and welcomed me very warmly. He took off his cloak, and under it he was wearing—imagine, who would think of such a thing!—a vest that was gray wool in front and white linen in back, and lined with sweat. I could not hold back my laughter. Pretending with a mighty effort that there was nothing to be offended about, he said, "You'll get used to it and then you won't laugh. I bet you don't know why I'm wearing the brim turned up on this hat."

I said because that was the style, and it made it easier for him to see.

"No: because it makes it harder for others to see," he said. "Look, the hat is missing the ribbon. With the brim turned up, nobody can tell."

As he said this, he took out more than twenty letters, saying he hadn't been able to deliver them, and another pile of *reales*. Each letter was marked one *real* of postage due, and he had written them all himself. He signed them with whatever name he fancied, wrote news that he made up, addressed them to the most distinguished people, and delivered them in that outfit while charging postage due. He did this once a month, making me amazed to see the novelty of life.

Just then two more men walked in, one wearing a coarse woolen vest that came down to mid-thigh and a cloak of the same wool, the collar turned up to hide where the material was torn. His wide

breeches were fine silk, but just so much of them as you could see. The rest was red baize. He was arguing loudly with the second man, who sported a plain collar for lack of ruffles, a string of gunpowder flasks for lack of a cloak, and a crutch, with one leg bound in rags and hides for lack of half his breeches: he was playing the part of a soldier. And he had actually been one, though a bad one, and in places that were at peace. He told fantastic stories of his service, and by playing on his status as a soldier he could get in anywhere.

The one with the vest and the semi-breeches was saying, "You owe me half, or at least a lot of it. If you don't give it to me now, I swear to God . . . !"

"Don't swear to God," the other said, "'cause as soon as we get home I'm not a cripple anymore, and what I'll give you is a thousand whomps with this crutch."

Yes, you will! No, you won't! And with the customary cries of *Liar!* they were at each other's throats, and as they grabbed they came away with hunks of clothing in their hands at the first tugs. We calmed them both down and asked what they were quarreling about.

The soldier said, "Put one over on me? You won't get a penny of it! Everybody, let me tell you what happened. There I was, in the plaza of San Salvador, and a kid came up to this beggar here and asked him if I was Lieutenant Juan de Lorenzana. So he said I was, because he noticed something or other in the kid's hands. He brought him over, called me Lieutenant, and said, 'Please see what this child wants, sir.' I figured out what was up, so I said I was the man. I took the message, along with a dozen handkerchiefs, and I sent a reply to the boy's mother, who had sent them to somebody with that name. Now this guy wants half the handkerchiefs! But I'll jump off a bridge before I give him anything of the sort. My nose is going to break in each and every one of those handkerchiefs."

The case was ruled in his favor, except for the verdict on using them to blow his nose: he was ordered to turn them over to the old woman to further the community's honor by making them into sleeve cuffs, which would stick out and represent whole shirts. Blowing your nose, other than into the air or by finger-flick, goes against the rules of the order.

Night fell, and it was something to see how we all slept in two beds, squeezed together so tight that we looked like instruments in a case. Suppertime had come and gone unobserved. Most did not bother to undress, since by lying down just as they had gone about during the day they kept the precept of sleeping naked.

2

In Which the Story Just Begun Continues, and Other Rare Adventures

At first light of the Lord's new day, we all armed ourselves for battle. I already felt so comfortable around them, it was as if we were all brothers (for we always find such ease and sweetness in wicked things). It was something to see one fellow putting on his shirt in a dozen installments, since it was split into a dozen rags, reciting a prayer over each one like a priest dressing for Mass. This fellow would lose track of a leg along the byways of his breeches, only to find it peeking out of the most inconvenient places. That one would ask for a guide to help him get his doublet on, and it would take a good half hour to straighten it out.

That accomplished, which was quite a sight, they all hefted needle and thread to stitch up one tatter or another. One fellow, lifting his arm to darn a hole in the pit, made an *L* with his body. Another knelt down and aped the figure *5* to come to the aid of his silk stockings. Yet another, to pleat his inseams, stuck his head between his legs and curled himself into a ball. Bosch painted no postures so strange as the ones I saw there,[77] for they kept sewing and the old woman kept handing them materials, rags, and scraps of various colors that the soldier had brought in.

Mending time (as they called it) came to a close, and they all checked each other to see what had turned out badly. They decided to go out. I said they should contrive my clothing first, because I wanted to spend my hundred *reales* on a suit and get rid of my academic robes. "Absolutely not," they said. "The money goes into the kitty. We'll dress him with things we already have on hand. Then we'll show him his turf in the city, where only he will be allowed to grift and hustle."

That sounded good to me. I added my money to the pile, and in an instant they turned my robes into a mourning jacket. After they

77. The Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) was a favorite of Phillip II, whose large collection of Bosch paintings now resides in Madrid's Prado Museum. See the contorted postures of figures in his *Garden of Earthly Delights*.

shortened my cloak, it looked fine. They traded the leftover cloth for an old, re-dyed hat. They made a hatband for it with some well-placed pieces of used blotting paper. They took my ruffled collar and wide breeches and traded them for a pair of straight-laced breeches with slashings only in front, since the sides and back were cheap, thin leather. The silk half-stockings, or less-than-half-stockings, did not reach more than four inches below my knees, but those four inches were enough for my tight boots to conceal the red socks I wore. The collar was more rough than ruffled. They put it on me and said, "The collar has problems in the back and on the sides. If anyone looks at you, you will have to turn to face him like a sunflower turning to face the sun. If there's two people coming at you from either side, back away. For anybody behind you, you should always wear your hat slung back so the brim will cover the nape of your collar and reveal your whole face. And if anyone asks why you wear it that way, tell him it's because you have nothing to hide and can show your face anywhere in the world."

They gave me a box that held black and white thread, silk, ribbon, a needle, a thimble, scraps of wool, linen, satin, and other fabrics, and a knife. They put a spur in my waistband, a flint-and-steel in a leather pouch, saying, "With this box you can go anywhere in the world without need of friends or kin: this contains everything we need to fix things up. Take it and keep it."

They assigned me the quarter of San Luis to grift in for a living.[78] And so I began my workday, leaving home with the others. Since I was a greenhorn, though, they gave me a godfather, just like a first-time priest gets, to start me off on the swindle. It was the same fellow who led me there and converted me.

We left the house with plodding footsteps, rosaries in hand, and took the road to my appointed neighborhood. We displayed courtesy to all. We took off our hats to the men, wishing we could do the same to their capes. We gave women the reverent greetings they enjoy, though they enjoy greeting reverends even more. My good tutor would say to one man, "They're going to pay me tomorrow." To another, "Give me one more day, sir, because the bank is giving me the runaround." This one asked to get his cape back, that one asked for his waistbelt. From this, I realized that he was so fond of his friends that he shared everything with them. We walked along, snaking from side to side of the street to avoid the houses where he owed money. One

78. San Luis, the district just north of the Puerta del Sol.

asked for the house rent, another for the rent on his sword, and another for that on his sheets and undershirts, and so I came to see that he was a gentleman for hire, the same way we have hired mules.

It then so happened that he caught sight, at a distance, of a man who, as he put it, kept twisting his arm over a debt, but there was never enough money. To avoid being recognized he put his hair down (he usually kept it tucked up behind his ears), turning himself Nazarite, something between a hermit and a wooly gentleman. Then he stuck a patch over one eye and started talking to me in Italian. He managed all this while the other fellow was walking in our direction, for the man was busy gossiping with an old woman and had not noticed us yet. When he caught up, I swear I saw the man walk circles around us, like a dog getting ready to lie down. He made the sign of the cross more frantically than a faith-healer and went away saying, "Lord! I thought it was him. Lose a cow and all you hear is cowbells."

I was dying with laughter at the figure my friend cut. He went into a doorway to put up his hair and put away the patch, and he said, "These are the fixes for running out on a debt. Watch and learn, brother, because there are a thousand tricks like this in this town."

We walked on and at one street corner, since it was morning, we got two slices of fruit preserves and some brandy from a woman selling on the street, who gave it all to us for free after wishing my instructor a good morning. And he told me, "Now a fellow doesn't have to worry about going without food today. If nothing else, we've had that."

I was deeply troubled by the thought that our dinner was still in doubt, and I let him know that I was troubled on my stomach's account. To this he replied, "You don't have much faith in the holy and religious order of the dog-hungry. The Lord never lets down crows, or jackdaws, or even notaries. Why would He let the famished down? You don't have much guts."

"True enough," I said, "but I'm really afraid of ending up with even less, and nothing in them."

On we talked until the clock struck twelve. Since I was a greenhorn in the trade, my stomach was none too satisfied with the fruit preserves. I felt as hungry as if I had not eaten anything. So, with my memories of hunger refreshed by the clock, I turned to my friend and said, "Brother, this hunger business makes for a tough apprenticeship. Man was made to eat like a horse, and here you've got me fasting. If you aren't hungry, it must be because you were raised on hunger since you were a child,

and now you can live on it, like the king who trained himself to eat poison. I don't see you making any serious effort to chow down, so I've made up my mind. I am going to do whatever it takes."

"God's body with you!" he replied. "It just rang twelve. What's the rush? You've got such a punctual, demanding appetite, but sometimes unpaid bills have to be borne with patience. But no! Let's just eat all the livelong day. What else do animals do? There's no record that any of us gentlemen ever had a bowel movement. Rather, for lack of any relief, we never relieve ourselves. I've already told you that God never lets anybody down. If you're really in such a hurry, I'm going to the soup kitchen at the San Jerónimo monastery,[79] where all the monks are fattened on milk, like capons, and there I'll stuff my craw. If you want to tag along, come on. If not, to each his own."

"Good-bye," I said. "I'm not so underfed that I have to make it up with somebody else's leftovers. Let's each go our own way."

My friend walked off, treading firmly and looking at his feet. He took out some breadcrumbs that he always carried in a small box for such occasions and sprinkled them over his beard and clothes to make it look like he had just eaten. I walked off, clearing my throat and picking my teeth to dissimulate my starvation, wiping off my mustache, with my scarf pulled up and my cloak thrown over my left shoulder, fingering my short rosary (short because it only had ten beads left). Everyone who saw me figured me for well fed. If they meant fed up with fleas, they were not far off.

I was counting on my ducats. Though it pained my conscience to even think of paying for a meal, which goes against the rules of those who eat free in the world, I was set on breaking my fast. And with that, I arrived at the corner of Calle de San Luis, where a pieman lives. A toasty double potpie sat in the window, and when the smell of the oven hit my nostrils I instantly stood as still as a pointer that has found the prey, staring straight at it. I looked at the pie so intensely it shriveled like it had been given the evil eye. It is amazing how many plans I came up with for swiping it; then I would resolve again to pay for it. In this, the clock rang one. I was in such anguish, I made up my mind to run into one of the taverns there. Just as I had homed in

79. This Hieronymite monastery, located just east of what then was the town limits of Madrid near what today is the Prado Museum, was a favorite of the Spanish royal family, who treated its church as the royal chapel. The monks took vows of poverty and dedicated part of the monastery's considerable wealth to poor relief.

on one, as God willed it I ran into a college friend, Flechilla, walking down the street, dragging the hems of his academic robes in the mud behind him until they were more speckled than a pimply face and trailing more muck than a garbage cart. He set upon me as soon as he saw me, and with the way I looked it was amazing he recognized me. I gave him a hug. He asked how I was doing. Right away, I said, "College boy! I've got so much news to tell you! I'm just sorry I have to go away tonight."

"I'm the one who's sorry, and if it weren't late and if I weren't rushing off to dinner, I'd stop and talk, but I'm keeping my sister and her husband waiting."

"What, my lady Ana's here? Let's go, even if it means dropping all my plans, because I want to do what duty demands of me."

My eyes grew wide when I heard that he had not eaten yet. I went off with him and started telling him about a girl of the town he had been very fond of in Alcalá, saying I knew where her house was and I could get him inside. The offer quickly got under his skin. It was a great move to talk about matters of desire with him. We reached the house still discussing the matter. We went in. I greeted his brother-in-law and sister effusively, and they, never guessing that I had not been invited over, started saying that if they had known they were going to have such a good guest they would have prepared something. I took the opportunity to invite myself, saying I was family, an old friend, and I would be insulted if they gave me the polite treatment.

They sat down. I sat down. And to make sure the fellow would take it better, since he had not invited me nor had it entered his mind to do so, I kept mentioning the girl, saying that she had asked me about him, that he was very dear to her, and other such lies. With that, he found it easier to bear watching me scarf down the food, because I ripped through the buffet like a cannonball through a buff coat. The stewpot came out, and in two gulps I polished almost all of it off, but with such savage speed that it seemed I wasn't even sure when I had it between my teeth. As God is my Father, I dispatched the regular meal quicker than the postman dispatches a special delivery; faster than the earth in Valladolid's old cemetery consumes a corpse, which it does in twenty-four hours.[80] They must have noticed my savage slurping of the soup and the way I drained the bowl, my persecution of bones and

80. The dirt in the churchyard surrounding Santa María la Antigua in Valladolid, said to have been brought from the Holy Land by returning Crusaders, was thought to consume bodies very quickly.

devastation of meat. And, truth to tell, in a pretend-joking way I even lined my pocket with bread crusts.

The table was cleared. The college boy and I stepped aside to talk about how to get him into the girl's house, me egging him on. While we stood talking by a window, I pretended to hear someone calling me from the street and said, "Who, me? I'll be right down, sir." I begged his pardon, saying I would be right back. To this day he is still waiting for me to return. I took off, following that old saying about "bread eaten and company departed." He later ran into me several times, and I excused myself by telling him a thousand tall tales, which are beside the point here.

I wandered through the city streets, got to the Puerta de Guadalajara, and sat down on one of the stools that the merchants there keep in their doorways. As God willed it, a pair of those women who get credit on their good looks showed up at the shop, faces veiled and accompanied by their old madame and young errand boy. They asked if I had any velvet with extraordinary lacework. Straight away I struck up a conversation by playing on their words, on "work" and "laces" and "lacy" and "lazy" and "tracing," until I had beaten the daylights out of their meaning. I felt that my free tongue had given them a sort of permission to take something from the shop, and since I had nothing to lose, I offered to let them have whatever they wanted. They declined, saying they never accepted gifts from strangers. I took advantage of the situation, saying it had been too forward of me to offer them anything, but I begged them to do me the favor of accepting some fabric I had been sent from Milan, which an errand boy would bring over that night—pointing at a boy standing in front of the shop across the street as if he were mine. He was waiting for his master to come out, which was why he had doffed his cap. And to make sure they took me to be a well-known man of substance, I constantly tipped my hat to every judge and gentleman who passed by. I did not know any of them, but I greeted them all as if we were on close terms. The women were blinded by this and by a hundred gold ducats that I drew from my purse with the excuse that I was going to give them to a beggar who had asked me for alms.

They said it was late and they had to go, so they excused themselves, warning me that the errand boy should be very discreet when he came. I asked them, half-jokingly, for the favor of giving me a rosary on a gold chain that the prettier of them was wearing, as security that I would see them the next day without fail. They declined

to give it to me. I offered them the hundred ducats as security, and they told me their address, and with the intention of swindling me out of even more, they trusted me and asked me where I lived, telling me that the errand boy would not be allowed into their house at all hours, as they were high-class people. I led them along Calle Mayor, and at the corner of Carretas I picked the biggest and best house that struck my fancy, one with a carriage standing without horses by the door, and told them it was my house, adding that the house, the coach, and the homeowner were at their service. I named myself Don Álvaro de Córdoba and walked right through the front door before their eyes. And I remember now that, when we were leaving the shop, I beckoned authoritatively to one of the errand boys with my hand. I pretended I was telling him they should all stay and wait for my return (for so I told the two women). The truth is, I was asking him if he was my uncle the Comendador's servant. He said he was not. In this way, like a proper gentleman, I put other men's servants to work.

Night darkened, and we all holed up at home. I came in and found the raggedy soldier holding a large wax candle, which he had been given to carry in a funeral procession. He had brought it home. The fellow's name was Magazo, born in Olías. He had been a captain in a comic play and had done battle against the Moors in a dance performance. When he talked to soldiers from the war in Flanders he said he had been in China, and to those from China he said Flanders.[81] He discoursed about fielding an army, when all he knew about fields was how to sit in one to pick his lice. He mentioned castles by name, when he had rarely seen the ones on the backs of copper coins. He praised the memory of Don John, and I often heard him say of Luis Quijada that he had had the honor of being his friend.[82] He dropped the names of Turks, galleons, and captains, all of which he had read in one or another of the verses that are floating around. And he knew nothing about the sea beyond how to ride a seesaw, so when he told

81. "China" was used as a generic term for Asia and particularly the Philippines, which was colonized by Spain beginning in 1565. Spain was at war in Flanders, a possession of the Spanish Crown since Charles I inherited the territory, more or less continuously from 1567 to 1648.

82. Don John of Austria (1547–1578) was the bastard half-brother of Philip II and hero of the naval battle of Lepanto (1571). Luis Mendez Quijada was tutor and advisor to Don John, in whose arms the old man died of wounds on the field of battle in 1570.

the story of the naval battle Don John commanded at Lepanto, he said, "That Lepanto there was a very headstrong Moor," since the poor fellow did not know it was the name of the sea. We always had a lovely time with him.

Then my friend came in, his nose split and his head all bandaged in rags, covered in blood and dirt. We asked why. He said he had gone to the San Jerónimo soup kitchen and asked for a double portion, saying it was for some poor but honorable people. They took soup from other beggars to give to him. The others, enraged, followed him to a corner behind the door, where they found him spiritedly gulping it down. Asking if it was nice to fool others to fill yourself and steal from others to get your own, they raised first their voices, then their clubs, then lumps and bumps all over his poor head. They attacked him with crockery. The damage to his nose was done by a wooden bowl that they gave him to sniff a little too fast for comfort. They took his sword. The porter ran out when he heard them shouting, but even he could not calm them. In the end, our poor brother found himself in such danger that he said, "I'll give you back what I ate!" But even that was not enough, because what really bothered them was the fact that he had begged in the name of other people and felt no pride in being a soup sponger.

"Look at him, all rags like a child's doll, sadder than a pieman's shop in Lent, covered with more holes than a flute, more motley than a piebald nag, more spotted than jasper, more punctuated than a music book," said one of those overgrown students who sponge whenever they aren't mooching. "The idea, that a man like me, worthy of being a bishop or something important, will eat at the blessed saint's soup kitchen, but this Don Nobody is embarrassed to eat there! I'm a bachelor of arts from the University of Sigüenza!"[83]

The porter intervened when he heard an old man in the crowd saying that, even though he sat at the beggars' table, he was a descendant of the Great Captain and had kin who would back him up.

Here I leave it, because my friend had already left to massage his bruises.

83. Having a bachelor's degree from the University of Sigüenza, the poorest and smallest university in Castile and the one with the lowest reputation, was hardly sufficient qualification to be a bishop.

3

In Which the Same Material Continues, until Everyone Ends Up in Jail

In came Merlo Díaz, his waistbelt bespangled with cups and glasses he had snagged with little fear of God, begging for water at nunnery windows. But he was outdone by Don Lorenzo del Pedroso, who walked in wearing a very nice cloak he had picked up at a trucco field in exchange for his own, which was too threadbare to cover the other fellow's loss decently. His trick was to take off his cloak as if to play and throw it in the pile with everyone else's. Then, acting as if he had found no playing partners, he went back for his cloak, picked up whichever one caught his fancy, and left. He pulled the same trick at games of ground billiards and nine pins.[84]

But this was all nothing compared to the entrance that Don Cosme made, surrounded by boys with scrofula, cankers, and leprosy, wounded and maimed. He had turned himself into a faith-healer by learning a few blessings and prayers from an old woman. Don Cosme had everybody beat, for anyone who came to him hoping to be cured without carrying a bundle under his cloak, coins jingling in his sleeve, or capons clucking was out of luck. He had laid waste to half the kingdom. He got people to believe whatever he wanted, for no better artificer of lies has yet been born. He did not even tell the truth by accident. He spoke of the Infant Jesus, came into people's houses uttering *Deo gratias*, recited the bit about "May the Holy Spirit be with you all." He had the hypocrite's whole toolkit: a rosary with humongous prayer beads; he would carelessly let a bit of scourge spattered with blood (from a nosebleed) peek out from beneath his cloak; when he scratched his itching back, he led people to believe that his lice were haircloths and that he was dog-hungry because he was fasting of his own free will. He spoke of temptations; when he mentioned the demon, he would say, "God save us and keep us"; he kissed

84. The related outdoor sports of trucco and ground billiards (*truco, juego de argolla*), popular in genteel society in the early 1600s, later developed into pall-mall and croquet. Nine pins (*bolos*) developed into various forms of bowls and bowling.

the ground on entering a church; he called himself unworthy; he never raised his eyes to look at women—though he would raise their skirts. By these means he attracted people so that they all entrusted themselves to him, and it was just like entrusting themselves to the devil. For he was a gambler and more. His sort are called card-sharps by some; others say flimflammers. He swore by the name of God, sometimes in vain and sometimes in vacuity. As for women, he had begotten a few children and impregnated two holy women. In sum, any commandments he did not break, he sundered.

In came Polanco making a huge racket and asking for dark sackcloth to dress in, a large cross, a long fake beard, and a bell. That was how he went around at night, saying, "Be ye mindful of death and do good for the souls in Purgatory," and so forth. In this way he brought in plenty of alms and gained entry to all the houses he found unlocked, and if there were no witnesses or impediments he would steal everything within reach. If anyone saw him, he would ring the bell and say in a voice he put on to sound very penitent, "Be ye mindful, brethren," and so on.

I had learned all their tricks and extraordinary methods of larceny in the space of a month. Now let us return to me. There I was, showing them the rosary and telling them its story. They heartily applauded my trick. The old woman took the rosary to sell. She then went with it house to house, saying it belonged to a poor young maiden who was parting with it to buy food. She had lies and frauds prepared for every occasion. The old woman wept at every step, wringing her hands and sighing at the bitterness of it all, calling everyone "my child." Over her fine blouse, doublet, dress, petticoats, and gown, she wore a torn sackcloth borrowed from a hermit on Alcalá street with whom she was friendly. She was the one who laid down the law for the herd, gave advice, and covered up.

It so pleased the devil, who never is idle in matters concerning his servants, that in a house where she went to sell some article of clothing and various other trifles, someone recognized something or other that belonged to him. He brought a constable, and they grabbed our old woman, who went by the name Mother Lebrusca. She soon confessed everything and told them how we all lived together and were gentlemen of prey. The constable left her in jail and came to the house and found all my companions there, and me with them. He brought along half a dozen deputies—hangmen walking—and threw the whole college of grifting in jail, where the order of gentlemen found itself truly endangered.

4

Which Tells of the Jail and What Went On There, through the Old Woman's Whipping, My Companions' Shaming, and My Release on Bail

They shackled and handcuffed each of us as soon as we entered, then submerged us in an underground cell. When I saw where I was heading, I took advantage of the money I carried on me and, pulling out a doubloon, told the jailer, "Sir, please have a word with me, in private." To get him to do it, I faced him with my coin. He saw it and drew me aside. "I beg of you, sir," I said, "take pity on an honest gentleman."

I sought his hands and, since his palms were made for bearing such dates, he snatched my double-ducat, saying, "I'll check up on your illness, but if it isn't serious they'll throw you in stocks." I caught on to his scheme and answered humbly. He left me outside and my friends were lowered into the cell.

I will skip telling about the gales of laughter that had greeted us in jail and along the streets. For the deputies had pushed and shoved us there, all roped together, some of us without cloaks and others dragging our cloaks behind us, until some of our bodies were patched and piebald and others looked like swirls of red wine and white. Some of us wore clothes so tenderized that the deputy had to grab them by their flesh to hold them, and even so there was nothing there for him to grasp, they were so eaten away by hunger. Others left the deputies holding bits of breeches and vests. When they removed the rope on which we had been strung, tatters clung to it.

Anyway, when night fell I went to sleep in the hall of nobility. I was given my own cot. It was something to see how some prisoners slept fully wrapped, without removing any of the clothes they wore by day, while others sloughed off everything they wore all at once, like snakes, and others played cards. And at last, doors locked, the lights were doused. We forgot all about our shackles.

The chamberpot was by the head of my cot, and in the middle of the night it was nothing but jailbirds coming and jailturds going. When I heard the noise, at first I thought it was thunder, so I crossed

myself and prayed to Saint Barbara.[85] But when I saw how bad it smelled, I realized these were not the right class of thunderbolts. They stank so much I was forced to bury my nose in the bedding. Some prisoners laid logs, others whole trees. In the end, I was forced to tell them to move the pot somewhere else, and we had words about whether or not "this one's getting too big for his britches." I designated myself first responder, since it is more important in a punchfest than in a province to be number one, and I gave him a taste of my belt. He jumped to his feet so fast he spilled the pot, and the noise of it woke up the crowd. We whipped each other roast-red in the dark, and the stench was so bad that everybody had to get up. With that, the noise and shouting grew, and the warden, worried that some of his vassals might be getting away, came running, armed, with his whole gang. He got there, opened the door, turned up a light, and took down information: everyone blamed me. In my defense I said that all night long they had not let me get a wink with all their stink. The jailer, thinking I might give him another doubloon to keep him from plunging me into the hole, snatched the opportunity and ordered me down there. I decided to submit rather than continue to squeeze my moneybag. I was taken below, where my friends greeted me with cheers and joy. I slept that night somewhat forlorn of blankets.

The Lord's day dawned and we left the underground cell. We met the others face to face, and the first thing they told us was that we had to pay the "cleaning fee" (as if I had gotten everything dirty in one night) or face a good strapping. I quickly gave up six *reales*. The others had nothing to give, so they were left to await their fate that night.

In the cell there was a one-eyed lad: tall, mustachioed, with a scowling face and a back that hulked with muscles and scars from the lash. He bore more iron than all Biscay: two sets of shackles and a heavy chain. They called him the Giant. He said he had been arrested for flighty things, and I supposed he meant that some stool pigeon had let fly with a denunciation of him, but when I asked if it was anything of the sort he said no, it was just about sins that were behind him. I thought he meant things from his past, but at last I discovered it was for sodomy. Whenever the warden rebuked him for causing trouble, the Giant called him the hangman's flunky and the general custodian of guilt. At other times he threatened the warden, saying, "Go ahead and

85. Patron saint of thunder and lightning.

dare do that to a guy who's going up in smoke. As God is God, I could squash you like a wine grape on my way out." He had confessed, and he was so wicked that we all wore spiked dog collars, like mastiffs, on our rear ends, and nobody dared break wind for fear of reminding him where we kept our backsides.

He was friendly with another fellow named Robledo and nicknamed Burly, who said he was in jail for taking liberalities. Pressed on it, it was for being liberal with his hands and filching everything he came across. He had been whipped more often than a post-horse, because all the hangmen had tried their hand on him. His face had been cut in so many knife fights it had more stitches than a tapestry. Each of his ears was missing its mate, and his nose was stuck together with stitches, though not stuck as well as the knife blade that had split it.

These two were joined by four more men, rampant as lions on a coat of arms, head to foot in chains and condemned to row the galleys. They said that they would soon be able to say they had served their king on land and on sea. You would not believe how cheerfully they awaited their sendoff.

All these men, scowling to see that my companions had not paid up, planned to flog them that night with a strap kept especially for the purpose.

Night fell. We were stuffed down in the building's deepest pocket. The lights were doused. I quickly hid under the sleeping boards. Two of the men started to whistle and another to crack the whip. My good gentlemen friends, seeing their affairs going downhill, squeezed their fasting flesh (on which lice and fleas had dined, supped, and breakfasted) so close together that they all fit inside one cranny in the platform. They were tight as nits in hair or bugs on a bed. The blows banged against the boards. My friends kept quiet. The rascals, seeing that no one yelled, stopped with the lashing and started throwing bricks, rocks, and rubbish they had gathered. That was when one of them caught Don Toribio on the back of the head and raised a lump on it two fingers thick. He started screaming that they were killing him. The rascals all sang a loud chorus and rattled their chains to keep his shouts from being heard. Don Toribio tried to hide by grabbing onto his companions and clambering under them. That was something to see, the effort he put into it making his bones rattle like Lazarus-clappers.

All life drained from his clothes. Not a tatter was left standing. The rocks and rubbish fell so fast that before long there were more gashes

on Don Toribio's head than slashes on a vest. Finding no relief from the hailstorm that befell him, and seeing himself so near to Saint Stephen's death (though no saint he),[86] he said that if they would let him come out he would pay them right away and would give them his clothes in pledge. They agreed, and despite the others who wanted to use him as a shield, he stood up as best he could with his cracked skull and crossed over to join me.

Though the others made the same promise as quick as they could, their noggins were already covered with more hard knocks than hair locks. They offered to pay the "patent" with their clothes, realizing it is better to be forced to stay in bed because you are naked than because of your wounds. So that night the lads let them be, and next morning they told them to strip. They stripped, and all their clothes together did not add up to a single lamp-wick.

They remained in bed, I mean, under a blanket—the threadbare one that everybody stood on to pick their fleas and lice. They soon began to regret their covering, for one louse in that blanket was dog-hungry, and another took bites so big that one chomp would have broken an eight-day fast. There were humongous lice on the blanket, and some that could take a bull by the ears. That morning the gentlemen thought they would end up a breakfast for lice. They threw off the blanket, cursing their fortune and scratching themselves to bits.

I left the cell, begging their pardon for not keeping them better company, because it was in my interest not to do so. I warmed the jailer's hands again with three pieces-of-eight,[87] and since I knew which notary would be the scribe for the case, I sent a boy to fetch him. He came. I brought him into an empty room and, after explaining the case to him, began telling him that I had a certain amount of money. I begged him to safeguard it for me and to do whatever he could to help forward the case of a hapless hidalgo who had been tricked into incurring such a crime.

"Believe me, sir," he said after pocketing the dough, "we control the whole game. If one of us decides not to act right he can do a lot of wrong. I've sent more men to the galleys for no reason, just because I felt like it, than there are letters in a trial transcript. Trust to me and you better believe I'll get you out safe and sound."

86. Considered the first Christian martyr, Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7: 58–60).

87. A piece-of-eight or silver peso was the size and value of eight *reales*.

With that he left, but he turned back at the door to ask me to contribute something for good old Diego García, the constable, since it would be useful to hush him with a silver gag. He also put me down for a little something to the court recorder to cover the costs of swallowing a whole paragraph. He said, "For a court recorder, sir, all it takes is an arch of the eyebrows, a rise in tone, a stamp of the foot to wake up a distracted judge (which is most of them), an emphasis or a gesture, and he can destroy a Christian."

I nodded and threw in fifty more *reales*. In payment, he told me to straighten out the collar of my cloak and gave me two remedies for the cold I had caught from the frigid jail. Lastly, he said, looking at my shackles, "You can save your worries: with eight *reales* to the warden he'll lighten your burden, for people of his sort don't do anything virtuous unless there's something in it for them."

I was grateful for the advice. Finally he left. I gave the jailer a piece-of-eight and he removed my shackles. The jailer let me into his house. He had a whale for a wife and two daughters of the devil, ugly and stupid, who lived the street life despite their faces. It so happened that the jailer (he was something-or-other Blandones de San Pablo and his wife was Ana Moráez) came home for dinner while I was there, and he was steaming mad. He refused to eat. His wife, suspecting something terrible had happened, came over and upset him so much with the customary imploring questions that he said, "What else? When that rotten rascal Almendros the quartermaster got into an argument with me about paying the rent, he told me you aren't clean."[88]

"So the rascal thinks my skirt tails are that dirty?" she asked. "By my grandfather's eternal soul, you're no man if you didn't yank his beard out. Should I call his maids to come and bathe me?" And, turning to me, she said, "Thank God he can't call me a Jew like him. Of the four sides of his family, two are low-born and the other two are Hebrew. I swear, Don Pablos, if I hear one more word out of him I'll remind him that he's got his back up against Saint Andrew's Cross."[89]

Then, deeply upset, the warden replied, "Ay, woman! I kept my mouth closed because he said you have two or three of those crosses yourself! He didn't call you dirty because you're a pig, but because you won't eat one."

88. Insinuating that she does not have "clean blood," in other words, that she is a conversa. She deliberately misunderstands the accusation.

89. A large red and yellow cross worn in penitence by those accused by the Inquisition of Judaism, in a form of public shaming.

"Oh, so he says I'm a Jew? And you sit there and tell me this so calmly, all fine and dandy! That's how you defend the honor of Doña Ana Moráez, daughter of Esteban Rubio and Juan de Madrid, as God and all the world know."

"What!" I said. "The daughter of Juan de Madrid?"

"That's right, Juan de Madrid from Auñón."

"I swear to God! The rascal who said that is a faggot cuckold Jew." And turning to them, I said, "Juan de Madrid, may he rest in peace, sir, was my father's first cousin. And I can produce written proof of who and what he was. This touches on my own honor. And if I get out of jail, I'll make that rascal take back what he said a hundred times over. I have a writ of nobility in my hometown that concerns us both, written in gold letters."

They were all very happy to meet their new kinsman, and the news of the writ of nobility lifted their spirits. I had neither a writ nor any idea who these two were. The husband started to ask more detailed questions about how we were related. To keep him from catching me in a lie, I kept pretending to lose my temper, swearing and cursing. They restrained me, telling me not to talk or think about it anymore. Every now and then I would let drop, "Juan de Madrid! The proofs I have for him! We'll have the last laugh." Other times I said, "Juan de Madrid the elder! Juan de Madrid's father was married to Ana de Acevedo, the fat one." And I would fall silent again.

In the end, with all this, the warden fed me dinner and gave me a bed to sleep in at his home. The good notary, beseeched and bribed with money, did such a good job that they paraded the old woman before the public, sidesaddle on a grey palfrey, with a singer of sins in front. This was the herald's cry: "This woman, for thieving!" The hangman kept time on her back, as prescribed by the gentlemen in gowns. All my companions came right after her, on palomino water mules, hats off and faces bare. They were being exposed to shame, and each one was so tattered that he wore his shame well exposed. They were banished for six years. I was let out on bail, by virtue of the notary. And the court reporter did not fail me, because he dropped his voice, spoke quietly, skipped phrases, and swallowed whole paragraphs.

5

How I Took a Room, and the Disaster That Befell Me There

I got out of jail. I found myself alone and bereft of my friends. Although they let me know they were heading towards Seville, funded by charity, I did not wish to follow them.

I decided to go to an inn, where I found a blond and white-skinned young woman: wide-eyed and cheerful, intrusive at times and at times extrusive, letting everything hang out. She lisped a bit, was afraid of mice, and was proud of her hands. To show them off she was always snuffing out candles, serving dinner at table, always clasping her hands in prayer at church, always pointing out whose house was this and whose was that on the street. In the drawing room, she continually repositioned some hairpin in her coiffure. If she played a game, it was always slapsies, because that was perfect for showing off her hands. She purposely pretended to yawn for no other reason than to show off her teeth and make the sign of the cross over her mouth. In a word, she handled her family so continuously that her own parents were already sick of it.

They gave me very good lodging in their house, because they made their living from renting it, well-furnished, to three boarders: I was one, another was a Portuguese, and a Catalan. They made me feel very welcome.

The young woman was not bad, I thought, being pleasant to view and convenient to have right there at home. I started giving her the eye. I entertained them with stories I had picked up. I brought them the news, not that there was anything new about it. I did every kind of service for them, so long as it cost me nothing. I told them I knew enchantments and was a necromancer, and could make the house appear to be sinking or burning, and other things that they, as good, credulous women, swallowed whole. I won their good will entirely, but not their love, for I was not dressed as finely as I should have been—though I had already improved my clothing somewhat by means of the warden, whom I constantly visited, keeping our kinship alive by dint of the meat and bread I ate from his table—so they did not pay me as much attention as they should have.

To gain a reputation as a rich man pretending to be otherwise, I hit on the idea of sending friends to call on me when I was out. The first of

them came around asking for his lord Don Ramiro de Guzmán—I had told them that was my name, since my friends had told me that changing names costs nothing but can prove very handy.[90] Anyway, he asked for "Don Ramiro, a rich merchant who has just signed three contracts with the King." The landladies did not recognize me from that description, and they replied that the only Don Ramiro de Guzmán who lived there was more beggar than merchant, slight of body, ugly of face, and poor.

"That," he replied, "is the man I am asking for. If only, God willing, I could pull in the income he makes—more than two thousand ducats a year."

He told them other lies, they were shocked, and he left them a sham bill of exchange for nine thousand ducats that he had come to have me cash. To get them to take it, he asked them to hand me the bill of exchange, and he left. Mother and daughter believed in my wealth, and they quickly marked me for a husband. I came home pretending to know nothing whatever, and when I entered they showed me the bill, saying, "Money and love are hard to keep hidden, Don Ramiro, sir. How could you conceal who you are from us, when you owe us so much affection?"

I pretended to be upset that he had left the bill of exchange and went to my room. It was something to see how, as soon as they believed I had money, they would tell me that everything was fine, they praised all my sayings, there were no jokes wittier than mine. When I saw how well I had hooked them, I declared my love to the girl, and she was only too happy to listen to me talk and answer with pure flattery.

We parted. And one night, to further convince them of my wealth, I closed myself in my room, which was separated from theirs by a very thin partition, and taking out fifty ducats I counted them so many times that they heard me count six thousand ducats. For them, this matter of finding me to have all that money was everything they could desire. They stayed awake at night just to entertain me and serve me.

The Portuguese was *senhor* Vasco de Meneses, Knight of the Order of Kid's Primers, I mean, of Christ.[91] He wore a long sackcloth cloak,

90. Names were key indicators of social status, but in the absence of official registries it was usually easy for people to change their names (especially surnames) during their lifetimes. The beggars exploit this fact to their advantage. Here Pablos gives himself a name that could belong to a high noble.

91. A caricature of the poor Portuguese with exaggerated social pretensions. (*Senhor* is the Portuguese equivalent of *señor* in Spanish.) The Military Order of Christ was the rough equivalent in Portugal of the wealthy and powerful Order of Santiago in Spain. Children's primers were headed by a large drawing of a cross called a *Christus*.

boots, a small collar, and a large mustache. He burned with passion for Doña Berenguela de Rebolledo, which was the girl's name. He tried to woo her by sitting with her in conversation and sighing more sighs than a church lady at a Lenten sermon. He sang badly, and was always at loggerheads with the Catalan, who was the sorriest, most miserable creature in God's creation: he ate oddly—that is, only on the odd days of the month—and his bread was so hard, even a backbiter would barely be able to sink his teeth in it. He had pretensions of bravery, but apart from his laying no eggs there was no reason not to call him a chicken, because he was always crowing about something.

When the two of them saw how well I was getting on, they went in for bad-mouthing me. The Portuguese said I was a lousy good-for-nothing scoundrel. The Catalan called me cowardly and base. I knew all this and sometimes I heard it, but I never felt like responding.

Anyway, the young woman was now talking to me and accepting my little notes. I started off with the usual: "Forgive this boldness," "Your great loveliness." I said the stuff about "I burn with passion," spoke of pining away, offered to be her slave, signed my name in a heart with an arrow through it. Finally, we got onto first names, and I, to further feed her belief in my quality, left the house, rented a mule, and returned to the inn all bundled up. I disguised my voice and asked for myself, inquiring whether this was the home of his lord Don Ramiro de Guzmán, Lord of Valcerrado y Vellorete. "There is a gentleman with that name," replied the girl, "slight of body, who lives here." And from her description, I said that he was the man I was looking for, and I beseeched her to tell him that Diego Solórzano, his steward come from the depository, was making his collection rounds and stopped by to pay his respects.

With that, I left. A while later I returned home. They received me with all the cheer in the world, asking why I had hidden from them the fact that I was the Lord of Valcerrado y Vellorete. They gave me the message. This stroke drove the girl round the bend. Eager for such a rich husband, she plotted to get me to come and converse with her at one in the morning. I would just have to walk along a balcony and jump down to the roof next to her bedroom window.

The devil, who is quick-witted in all things, ordered it so that at nightfall, given my desire to take advantage of the situation, I climbed up to the balcony and, while trying to get from there to the right rooftop, I lost my footing and hit the roof of the notary who lived next door, landing with such an extravagant crash that I broke all the tiles and bruised my ribs. The noise woke up half the house. Since notaries

are always wary of thieves, he and his servants feared the worst and rushed up to the roof. I saw them coming and tried to hide behind a chimney, which only increased their suspicions, because the notary and two servants and a brother beat me black and blue with sticks and clubs, and tied me up in full view of my lady, and nothing I could do helped. But she only laughed long and hard, because I had told her about how I knew how to do tricks and cast spells, so she thought I had fallen as a joke and a magic performance, and she kept telling me to come on up because she had seen enough. Between that, and the way they had drubbed and pummeled me, I was howling. The best part was that she thought it was all a show and could not stop laughing.

The notary immediately began to draw up the criminal accusation, and when he heard some keys jingling in my pocket, he said and wrote that they were skeleton keys, even though he saw them, and there was no way to convince him otherwise. I told him my name was Don Ramiro de Guzmán, and that gave him a good laugh. Sad to have been seen beaten up in front of my lady and to find myself under arrest for no reason and getting a bad name, I did not know what to do. I begged him on my knees, but neither my knees nor my begging were enough to move the notary. All this took place on the roof-tiles, which saw fit to bear that false witness even in full view of Heaven. Orders were given to bring me down, which they did through a window that opened onto a room that served as kitchen.

6

In Which the Story Continues, with Other Sundry Events

I did not close my eyes all night long, as I pondered my great misfortune—not falling onto the roof, but falling into the notary's cruel, savage hands. And when I recalled the bit about the skeleton keys they had found in my pocket, and the pages that he had written in

the accusation, I realized that nothing grows like the guilt of someone who comes into a notary's power.

I spent the night turning over schemes in my mind. I resolved a few times to beg him in the name of Jesus, but then I thought about what his sort had done to Him during His lifetime and did not dare. I tried to untie myself a thousand times, but he quickly sensed it and got up to check the knots on me, for he was wider awake forging his falsehoods than I was trying to get away. He rose at dawn and got dressed so early that the only ones up in the whole house were him and the testimony he had drawn up. He grabbed a leather strap and gave my ribs another good going-over, scolding me for the sin of stealing, something he knew all about.

That's where we were—him giving me the old what-for, me almost ready to give him money (the only blood that can soften such a diamond)[92]—when, urged and obliged by the pleas of my beloved, who had seen my fall and my beating and was convinced at last that it was not a magic trick but a calamity, the Portuguese and the Catalan came in. When the notary saw them speaking to me, he unsheathed his pen and tried to skewer them in the indictment as accomplices. This the Portuguese would not bear, and he abused the notary for a while with his words, telling him that he was a *fidalgo* nobleman of the King's house and that I was an *home muito fidalgo* and that it was sheer rascality to keep me tied up.[93] He started to untie me, and straight away the notary yelled for help. Two of his servants, part-deputies and part-drudges, stamped on their own cloaks and undid their collars the way people do to represent punches that were never thrown, and shouted for the King's justice.

The Portuguese and the Catalan untied me in the end. When the notary saw that no one was coming to his aid, he said, "I swear to God, nobody gets away with doing this to me! If you weren't the gentlemen you are, this would cost you dearly. Do something to satisfy these witnesses, and bear in mind that I'm not making anything from serving you."

92. The diamond here is the notary's hard heart. According to an old belief, repeated as fact by Covarrubias (1611: 632), diamonds are "so hard that they cannot be shaped by any instrument except by another diamond or by hot goat blood."

93. In his agitation, the Portuguese slips into his own language, which is close enough to Spanish to be understood: *home muito fidalgo* means "a very hidalgo man."

I immediately caught his drift. I took out eight *reales* and gave them to him, and I was even ready to return the drubbing he had given me, but I did not want to admit that I had taken it, so I let it be and left with the pair, thanking them for rescuing me and setting me free.

I came home with my face roughed up with punches and my back rather displeased with the clubbing. The Catalan could not stop laughing, and he told the girl she should marry me to turn the refrain on its head, so that instead of "cuckolded, then beaten," it would go "beaten, then cuckolded."[94] He called me stiff-necked and hard-headed, because the beating did not crack my skull. They were always insulting me with such puns. If I stopped to visit them, they would always start asking if I meant to *stick* around and whether I wanted to join the *club*.

When I saw how embarrassed and insulted I was, and realized they were already figuring out my rich-man hustle, I started plotting to leave the house. To keep from paying for my room and board, which added up to a few *reales*, and to get my stuff out for free, I arranged to have a lawyer from Hornillos named Brandalagas and a couple of his friends come one night and arrest me. They arrived on the appointed night and notified the landlady that they were there on behalf of the Inquisition and that secrecy would be expedient. The women trembled because of the way I had made myself out to be a necromancer. When they carried me off, the women remained quiet, but when they saw my stuff being carted off they asked to hold onto it in lieu of my debt. The men replied that it now belonged to the Inquisition. At that no earthly soul breathed a word. They let the men leave and stood there saying this was what they had always feared. They told the Catalan and the Portuguese about the men who had come for me, saying they were demons and that I had a familiar.[95] And when they told them about the coins I had counted, they said it sounded like money, but it was not. They were never persuaded of that.

94. The full saying was *Tras cornudo, apaleado y mandádle bailar.* Stevens (1706: 124) comments: "*When a man is cuckolded and beaten bid him dance.* This they say when a man is much wronged and yet they make him pay costs, or when after abusing a man they would have him be merry. The story is of one who, catching his wife with a great man, was beaten by him and then they made friends, and the company danced bidding the husband dance with them, who answers with this proverb. As if it were not enough that a man should be cuckolded and beaten, but he must dance too."

95. A familiar, or "familiar spirit," is an animal or an evil spirit in animal shape supposedly used by witches to do their bidding.

I got away with my furnishings and food gratis. I talked with the men who had helped me, and we came up with a scheme to change my clothing style by dressing up in embroidered breeches, fashionable clothes, and wide collars, and getting a footman. Or instead of the footman I could make change and get two little footboys, which was the latest style. They spurred me on, tantalizing me with images of the benefits that would come my way if I married ostentatiously while pretending to be rich, and telling me this sort of thing goes on all the time in the Capital. They even added that they would direct me towards a useful area where I would do fine, and they would contrive some means to guide me. Black with greed to catch a wife, I resolved to do it.

I went to loads of public auctions and bought my marrying get-up. I found out where horses were for hire and rode off on one, stiff and proud, the first day. I did not find a footman. I went to Calle Mayor and stationed myself in front of a saddlery shop as if I were shopping for something. Up came two gentlemen, each with his own horse. They asked me if I was thinking of buying the silver trappings that I was fingering. I let the patter fly and kept them there for some time with a thousand polite phrases. Finally they said that they wanted to go to the Paseo del Prado to have some fun, and that if I did not find it tiresome I could join them.[96] I left word with the shopkeeper that if my pages and footman came looking for me, they would find me on Prado. I described their livery, joined the two gentlemen, and off we went. I rode along, thinking that nobody who saw us could possibly guess which of us the pages and footmen served nor which of us had none.

I started talking in a very loud voice about the jousting games in Talavera and about a porcelain-blue horse I owned, and I told them marvels about Roldanejo, the steed I was expecting from Cordova. Every time we ran into a page, a horse, or a footman, I would stop them and ask whose horse it was, talk about its markings and whether it was for sale, have it make a couple of turns in the street, find some fault with the bridle even if there was nothing wrong with it, and tell them how to fix it. As my luck had it, I ran into many opportunities to do this. Since my companions were growing astonished and, it seemed

96. This wide boulevard along what was then the eastern border of the city was a favorite place for the well-to-do to see and to be seen. The San Jerónimo monastery and the adjoining Buen Retiro royal palace were located just across Prado.

to me, asking, "Who *is* this scrounging sparrowhawk squire?" and since one of them wore the insignia of a military order on his breast, and the other wore a chain of diamonds (worth an insignia and a country estate put together), I said I was on the lookout for some good horses for myself and a cousin of mine, because we were both planning to enter some competitions.

We reached Prado and, as we turned onto it, I took my foot out of the stirrup, let my heels dangle, and began riding at a stroll. I wore my cloak flung over my shoulder and held my hat in my hand. Everybody was looking at me. This one said, "I've seen that fellow on foot." The other one, "Hey, it's the grifter, looking natty." I pretended I heard nothing and kept on strolling.

The pair drew up to a carriage full of ladies and asked me to fool around for a while. I let them take the girl's side of the carriage while I pulled up to the mother and aunt's running board. They were a couple of merry old women, one fifty years old and the other hardly any younger. I told them a thousand tender nothings, and they listened to me, for no woman, no matter how aged, is as old as she is conceited. I promised to bring them treats and asked them about the younger ladies. They replied that the girls were young and unmarried, and you could tell it was true from the way the girls talked. I said the usual thing—that I hoped the young ladies would make satisfactory matches—and they were very impressed by the phrase "satisfactory matches." They then asked me what business had brought me to the Capital. I told them I was running away from my father and mother, who wanted to marry me, against my will, to an ugly, stupid, base-born woman only because she had a large dowry. "And, my ladies, I would rather have a clean woman without a stitch to her name than a wealthy Jewess, for by the goodness of God I inherited an estate that brings in just about four thousand ducats a year,[97] and if I come out on top in a lawsuit I'm fighting, I couldn't ask for more."

The aunt quickly jumped on this: "Oh, sir, how I wish you well! Don't get married to anyone you don't love, and she must be a woman of the right sort. I can guarantee you, even though I'm not very rich, I haven't allowed my niece to take some rich marriage offers she's gotten, because they weren't to people of quality. She may be poor, since

97. Here, "clean" refers to the hypothetical bride's "pure blood," free of Jewish ancestry. Two of the early versions have "four thousand," a large fortune; the other two have "forty thousand," an immense fortune.

she only has a dowry of six thousand ducats, but as for blood, she isn't beholden to anybody."

"That I can well believe," I said.

Just then the young ladies put an end to the conversation by asking my friends for a bit of luncheon.

> Each one looked at the other,
> and both of their beards did tremble.[98]

Seeing an opportunity, I said I missed having my pages with me, because it meant there was no one I could send to fetch some provisions I had at home. They thanked me for the thought, and I entreated them to come to Casa del Campo the following day,[99] when I would send them some cold meats. They quickly accepted. They told me their address and asked me for mine.

With that, the carriage went on its way, and my companions and I started the ride back. When they saw how generous I had been with the luncheon business they took a liking to me and, to put me under obligation to them, beseeched me to have supper with them that night. I got them to beg me a little, though not much, and I did have supper with them, sending down to look for my servants and swearing I would fire them. The clock struck ten and I said it was time for a certain dalliance, and so I begged my leave. We all agreed to meet in Casa de Campo the following afternoon, and I left. I returned the horse to the man who had rented it to me, and from there I went home, where I found my companions playing a little game of four-card draw.[100] I told them what had happened and the agreement we had made, and we resolved to send them the luncheon spread without fail and to spend two hundred *reales* on it.

98. Quevedo adapts these lines from the ballad "Muerte de don Alonso de Aguilar," about a Spanish captain killed by Moors in the mountains of southern Spain in 1501. In the ballad, King Ferdinand calls all his knights and captains to his tent and asks who will dare to make a sortie in the mountains; they look at each other and tremble, and only brave Don Alonso steps forward. The implication is that the two "gentlemen" may be faking their social status nearly as much as Pablos is: they pretend to be very rich, but the idea of paying for a fancy luncheon frightens them.

99. A large park, originally a royal hunting ground, across the Manzanares River on the west side of Madrid.

100. The game was *quinolas*, a forerunner of poker played with four-card hands using a thirty-two-card deck (aces through sevens plus jacks).

We went to bed after making these resolutions. I admit that I could not sleep all night long, worrying about what I should do with the dowry. What kept me most in doubt was whether I should use it to buy a house or invest it in an annuity, for I did not know which would be better and more profitable for me.

7

In Which the Story Continues, with Other Noteworthy Events and Misfortunes

Day dawned and we woke up to figure out a way to get the servants, silverware, and food for the luncheon. In the end, since money now rules everything and no one disrespects it, some was paid to a gentleman's butler, who provided me with silverware and served the food with three servants.

The morning went in making the necessary arrangements, and by that afternoon I had my rented horse. I set out at the appointed time for Casa de Campo. I had stuck a whole pile of papers that looked like legal documents into my waistbelt and unbuttoned six buttons of my vest to stuff more papers there. I arrived, and the women and the gentlemen and everybody were already there. The women received me adoringly, while the men spoke to me like old friends. I had told them my name was Don Felipe Tristán, and all day long it was nothing but Don Felipe this and Don Felipe that. I started telling them about how I had been so busy working on business for His Majesty and my estate accounts that I had been afraid I might not be able to make it, so I warned the ladies it would be an improvised luncheon.

Just then the butler arrived with his gear, silverware, and serving lads. The gentlemen and the ladies just stared at me, speechless. I told the butler to go set things up in the bower while we went to see the fish ponds. The old women came over to compliment me, and I was delighted to see the girls with their faces uncovered, for I had never seen anything so lovely since the day God made me as the girl at whom I was aiming my marriage intentions: white, blond, blushing,

small mouth, tiny and closely spaced teeth, good nose, full green eyes, tall stature, lovely large hands, and a bit of a lisp. The other was not bad either, but she was more open and frivolous and gave me the impression of having been nuzzled.

We walked to the ponds, saw everything, and in our conversation I learned that my betrothed would have been in trouble if she had lived in Herod's time, she was so innocent:[101] she knew nothing. But since I don't want women as either counselors or fools but just to go to bed with me, and going to bed with an ugly but wise woman would be like lying down with Aristotle or Seneca or a book, I try to pick ones who are well-endowed for the offensive arts. This consoled me. We were approaching the bower when, passing by a grove, the lace of my collar snagged on a tree and was slightly torn. The girl came over and reattached it for me with a silver pin, and her mother told me to send the collar to their house the next day, because Doña Ana (that was the girl's name) would mend it for me there.

Everything was perfect: plenty to eat, hot and cold meats, fruits and sweets. They cleared the tablecloths, and as they were doing this I saw a gentleman approaching with two servants through the orchard in front of us, and before I know it, there I am looking at my good man, Don Diego Coronel. He came over to me and, since I was wearing that outfit, all he did was stare. He spoke to the women, addressing them as his cousins, but all the while he kept turning back to look at me. I was talking to the butler, while the other two gentlemen, who were his friends, started quite a conversation with him. He must have asked them what my name was, because they said, "Don Felipe Tristán, a very honorable and rich gentleman."

I saw him cross himself. Finally, in front of the ladies and everyone, he went up to me and said, "Please forgive me, sir. By God, until I learned your name I mistook you for someone else entirely. For I've never seen anyone who looks so much like a servant I once had in Segovia, whose name was Pablillos, son of a barber from that town."

Everyone had a good laugh, and I made a supreme effort to keep my blush from giving me away. I said I wanted to meet that man, because countless people had told me we looked very similar. "Lord!" said Don Diego. "Beyond similar! The features, the voice, the gestures—I've

101. Referring to the Massacre of the Innocents, the slaughter of male babies ordered by King Herod (Matthew 2:16–18). The girl is "innocent" in the other sense of the word: hopelessly naïve.

never seen anything like it! Let me tell you, sir, it's the most amazing thing. I've never seen such a close similarity."

Then the old women, aunt and mother, asked how it could be that such a prominent gentleman would look like such a base scoundrel as that. And to keep Don Diego from suspecting them of anything, one added, "I know Don Felipe very well. He is the one who put us up in Ocaña at the behest of my husband, who was his great friend."

I caught her drift and said that it was and always would be my fondest wish to serve them in any small way I could, everywhere.

Don Diego offered his apologies and begged my pardon for insulting me by mistaking me for the son of a barber. He added, "You would not believe it, sir. His mother was a witch, his father a thief, his uncle a hangman. Worse, he is the vilest, most ill-inclined man on God's earth." What could I have felt when I heard such insulting things said about me, right to my face? I felt, though I concealed it, like I was standing on live coals.

We talked about getting back to town. The two gentlemen and I bid farewell. Don Diego and the women got into the carriage. He asked them what the luncheon was about, and why they were with me. The mother and aunt told him about how I had inherited an estate with an income of so many ducats, and that I wanted to marry little Ana. If he looked into it, he would see that this was not only perfectly true but a matter of great honor for all their kin. In this way they passed the time all the way to their house, which was on Calle del Arenal near the San Felipe monastery.[102] My two companions and I went together to their house, as we had the night before. They asked me to play cards, eager to fleece me. I got the hint and sat down. They brought out the cards, which were marked. I lost the first hand. Then I set about playing underhanded and won about three hundred *reales* off of them. With that, I bid farewell and came home.

I met my companions Brandalagas the lawyer and Pero López, who were practicing some brand-new tricks with dice. They left off when they saw me so they could ask me what had happened. All I said was that I had found myself in a very tight spot. I told them how I had run into Don Diego and what had happened to me. They consoled me, advising me to put up a false front and not give up my campaign by any means.

Just then we found out that they were playing a game of parar at the apothecary's house next door.[103] I understood the game reasonably

102. Around the Puerta del Sol in the center of Madrid, a ritzy area at the time.

103. Parar was a Spanish card game favored by gamblers and cheats, as seen above in Book 3, Chapter 3.

well by then, because I had a sleeveful of tricks and some lovely stacked decks. We resolved to go over and make a killing, which is what they call it when you wipe out somebody's purse. I sent my friends on ahead. They entered the room and asked if anyone wanted to play with a Benedictine friar who had come to town to rest and recuperate at the house of some cousins, for he was sick, and also loaded with pieces-of-eight.

Everyone's eyes grew wide, and they shouted, "The friar's welcome here! Bring him over!"

"He's a man of some consequence in his order," replied Pero López. "Since he's in town, he wants a little entertainment, but he is only doing it for the conversation."[104]

"Bring him over, whatever it's for."

"No strangers should be let in, for secrecy," said Brandalagas.

"No worries there," replied the host.

With that, they thought they had a sure thing and swallowed the lie. My acolytes returned. I was already wearing a nightcap on my head (to hide my lack of a tonsure and feign illness), my Benedictine friar's habit (which had fallen into my hands on some occasion), and a pair of glasses, and it did not hurt that my beard was neatly trimmed. I entered very humbly and sat down. The game began. They cut the deck smartly. They ganged up, three against one. But the three ended up a sullen gang, because I knew more tricks than they did, and over the course of three hours I gave them such a bilking that I came away with more than thirteen hundred *reales*. I handed out tips to the onlookers, and with my "Praised be Our Lord!" I bid them farewell, urging them not to be scandalized by seeing me play, for it was just entertainment and nothing else. The others, who had lost all the money they had, cursed themselves to a thousand devils. I said good-bye and we left.

We got home at half past one and went to bed after divvying up the spoils. This consoled me a little after what had happened, and the next morning I got up to go get a horse, but I could not find one for hire anywhere, which told me that there were many others like me out there. Since going on foot looked bad, especially right then, I went to San Felipe and found a footman who was watching the horse while his master, a lawyer, was at Mass. I handed him four *reales* to let me ride the horse a couple of times around Calle del Arenal, my lady's street, while his master was at church. He agreed. I mounted the horse and

104. "Entertainment" and "conversation" both doubled as euphemisms for gambling at cards.

rode up and down the street twice without seeing anyone, but on my third round Doña Ana looked out her window. When I saw her I wanted to show off, though I did not know the horse's quirks and was not a skilled horseman: I struck it twice with my riding stick and yanked on the reins. It reared up, kicked twice, and took off at a gallop, throwing me headfirst into a puddle.

When I found myself there, surrounded by boys who had come to gawk, and right in front of my lady, I started saying, "Oh, sonofabitch! Why wasn't I riding my fine Valenzuela filly! That frisky horse is going to be the death of me. They told me about its quirks, but I insisted on testing it."

The footman was already leading the horse, which he had caught right away. I mounted again. At the noise, Don Diego had come to his window (for he lived in the same house as his cousins). When I saw him, I went pale. He asked me if anything was wrong. I said no, though actually I had hurt one of my legs badly. The footman rushed up, afraid to be caught by his master, who would soon continue on his way to the palace. And I am so unlucky that, while the footman was telling me we should leave, the little lawyer walks up behind him and, recognizing his nag, attacks his footman and starts punching him, screaming about what a rascal he was, daring to lend his horse to anybody. And the worst of it was that when he turned on me, he angrily told me to go with God but go on foot. All this took place right in front of my lady and Don Diego: no whipped prisoner has ever been so shamed. I was incredibly sad, and rightly so, to run into two such awful pieces of bad luck in such a short space.

In the end, I had to dismount. The lawyer mounted and rode off. I tried to pass it off as nothing, continuing to talk with Don Diego from where I stood in the street. I said, "I've never ridden such an awful beast in all my life. My own palomino, which I left there by San Felipe, loves to bolt and run, but I told them that I can make it race and make it stop. They pointed to the other horse there, that lawyer's, and told me I wouldn't be able to manage it. I insisted on trying. You wouldn't believe how stiff in the haunches it is, and with that awful saddle it's a miracle I didn't kill myself."

"That's right," said Don Diego, "but all the same, it looks like that leg's hurting you."

"It is," I said, "and I'd like to take my own horse and head home."

The girl was satisfied and felt sorry about my fall, but the business with the lawyer raised Don Diego's suspicions, and that was totally the cause of my misfortune, aside from all the other things that happened to

me next. The worst of these, and the reason for all the rest, was that when I got home and went to check on the chest where I kept a valise with all the money I had inherited and had won at cards, minus a hundred *reales* that I carried on me, I found that the good lawyer Brandalagas and Pero López had absconded with it. And those fellows were nowhere to be found. I felt numb, uncertain where to turn. I said to myself, "Woe be the man who puts his trust in ill-gotten gains, which go as easily as they come! Poor me! What will I do?" I did not know whether I should try looking for them or notify the authorities. That did not seem like a good idea, because if the officers caught them they would pin the Benedictine habit and other things on me, and that meant the gallows. But as for going after them, I did not know where to begin.

In the end, to avoid losing the marriage as well, since I figured the dowry would be my salvation, I decided to stay and press things forward full speed. I had dinner, and that afternoon I rented my pony and went to my lady's street. I did not have a footman, and did not want to pass by her house without one, so I waited on the corner until somebody walked by who looked the part. When one did, I followed him, making him my fake footman. Reaching the other end of her street, I hid around the corner until a similar-looking man went by, then made another round.

I do not know why—whether it was the fact that I truly was the scoundrel Don Diego suspected me to be, or whether it was the suspicions raised by the lawyer's horse and footman, or what—but he set about investigating who I was and how I made my living. He spied on me. In a word, he did so much that, through the most extraordinary pathways in the world, he uncovered the truth. I was pressing bravely onward to marriage, at least a paper marriage. Meanwhile, he was hot on my trail, followed close behind by the women, who wanted to close the deal. And then he ran into our college friend, Flechilla, the one who had invited me to dinner when I was with the gang of gentlemen. Flechilla was still angry that I had left him in the lurch, so when he talked to Don Diego, knowing that I had been his servant, he told him how I had acted when he took me to his house for dinner, and added that just two days ago he had run into me on horseback, very finely dressed, and I had told him of the rich marriage match I was about to make.

That was all Don Diego needed to hear. Running back home, he met my friends, the gentleman with the insignia and the one with the diamond chain, near the Puerta del Sol and told them what was going on and asked them to get ready and, when they saw me on the street

that night, to bash my brains. He told them they would recognize me in the cloak he had on, for I would be wearing it. They came to an agreement, and when they turned into the street and ran into me, all three put on such a good show that I thought they had never been so friendly to me as they were then. We stood there discussing what would be good to do that night until the Ave Maria bell tolled. Then the pair bid good night. They took off down the street, and Don Diego and I were left alone and turned towards San Felipe. As we reached the entrance to Calle de la Paz,[105] Don Diego said, "By your life, Don Felipe, let's switch cloaks, because I'd rather not be recognized when I walk through here."

"Of course, and good luck," I said. I innocently took his cloak and gave him mine. I offered to watch his back, but he was scheming to have mine walloped, so he said he would rather go it alone and that I should leave.

Hardly had I parted from him, dressed in his cloak, when the devil ordained that two men, lying in wait to give Don Diego a beating over a girl of the town, mistook me for him because of the cloak, jumped up, and started raining blows down on me. I shouted, and they realized from my voice and face that I was the wrong one. They ran off, and I was left alone in the street with my bruises. I covered up two or three of the worst lumps and stood there for a while, not daring enter my lady's street out of fear.

Finally, at twelve, which was when I usually talked to her, I showed up at her door. Then, pulling up to me, one of the pair who had been lying in wait for me on behalf of Don Diego attacks me with a cudgel, deals two stout blows on my legs, and knocks me down. The other one then comes over and gives me a gash from ear to ear. They steal the cloak and leave me lying on the ground, saying, "That's how we make ill-bred swindling scoundrels pay!"

I started shouting and calling for confession. Since I had no idea what the beating had been about—though I suspected from their words that the landlord I had cheated with the Inquisition scheme might have been behind it, or perhaps the warden I had fooled, or my vanished companions; in fact (to sum up), I expected a back-stabbing from so many people that I did not know who to blame, though I never suspected Don Diego or the reason why he arranged it—I screamed, "After them! Cloak thieves!"

105. This street formerly joined the Puerta del Sol where the Casa de Correos has stood since 1768.

My shouts drew the officers of justice. They helped me up and, when they saw that I had an eight-inch slash across my face, no cloak, and no idea what had happened, they held me up and took me to be treated. They placed me in a barber's house. He bandaged me. Then they asked me where I lived and brought me home. I lay down in bed and spent the night confounded to find my face cut in two, my legs so battered from the blows that I could not stand on them or even feel them, myself robbed, and in a position where I could neither go hunting for my friends, nor try for the marriage, nor remain in the Capital, nor leave it.

8

My Recovery and Other Outlandish Events

Here we have dawn breaking and, at the head of my bed, the landlady of the house: an honest old woman, a real spring chicken (just fifty-five), with her large rosary and her face looking like a dried peach or a walnut shell with all its furrows. She enjoyed good fame around town, and she slept well with it, and with anyone who wished to join. She synchronized tastes and brought pleasures face to face. Her last name was Guía.[106] She rented out her house and was a good saleswoman for renting out others. All year long, her place was always full of people.

It was something to see her instruct a girl in the art of the veil, first teaching the girl which parts of her face she should leave uncovered. A girl with good teeth should always laugh, even when giving condolences. One with fine hands, she taught, should wield them as a fencer wields a sword. For the blond girl, a swish of the hair and some locks peeking out from the kerchief and the veil; for the one with nice eyes, doing pretty dances with the pupils, fluttering them, closing them, and raising them to look up high. In dealing with cosmetics, girls would

106. The surname means "guide." Her description is full of euphemisms for prostitution and procuresses.

come in as black as crows and after she fixed up their faces would go home so white their own husbands would not recognize them. What she was most extraordinary at was mending maidenheads and repairing virgins. In just one week at her house, I saw her do all this. And to sum up what she was, she taught the women how to fleece men, and which proverbs to recite. With that, she told them how to capture the prize: girls, through charm; young women, because it is owed them; and old women, through obligation and respect. She taught them the ways to ask for cash and the ways to ask for chains and jewelry. She liked to quote La Vidaña, her colleague from Alcalá, and La Planosa from Burgos, women who knew every trick.

I have mentioned all this so that you will feel pity for me when you see whose hands I fell into and will ponder more deeply the things she said to me. And she began with these words, for she always spoke in proverbs:

"When you just take out and never put back, Don Felipe, son, you soon reach the bottom of the sack. Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind. Make your bed and lie in it. I don't understand you, and I don't get your way of living. You're a young lad. I'm not surprised that you get yourself into trouble without noticing that we're all marching towards the grave while we sleep. I'm just made of mortal clay, so that's something I can tell you about. What am I supposed to make of it when they tell me you've wasted a whole fortune and you don't know how, and that they've seen you here first as a student, then a scoundrel, then a gentleman, all because of who you hang around with? You can tell a man by the company he keeps. Birds of a feather flock together. You should know, son, that there's many a slip between cup and lip. Come on, you silly goose, if you've been getting worked up about women, you know full well that I'm a seasoned inspector in this marketplace. I make my living from postures and prices, whether I'm teaching them or setting them, and in this house we're almost giving them away. You shouldn't be hanging around one scoundrel after another, trying to catch one sugar doll after another painted-up wench who wears out her skirts on whoever will fill her purse. Let me tell you, you would have saved a pile of ducats if you'd left things up to me, because I'm not too very greedy. And, by my dead and departed ancestors (may I meet as good an end as they did!), I wouldn't even be asking you now to pay me what you owe me for your room if I didn't need the money to buy some candles and herbs." For she trafficked in potions without being an apothecary, and if you greased her palms, she would grease herself up and fly out the chimney at night.

When I saw that she had concluded her speech and sermon by asking me for money—that was her theme, so like any preacher she had finished rather than begun with it—her visit no longer surprised me, though she had never visited me before in all the time I had been her guest, except for one day when she came to explain away something that she heard I had been told about. It was something or other having to do with witchcraft, and that they had tried to arrest her, but she had hidden her street and her house. At that time she had come to set me straight and tell me it was another woman named Guía. It is not surprising that with Guides like her we have all been led astray.

I counted out her money, and as I was giving it to her, misfortune, which never forgets me, and the devil, who always remembers me, worked it out so that some officers came to arrest her for being a kept woman, and they knew that her lover was in her house. They entered my room and, since they saw me in bed, and her with me, they attacked both me and her and gave me a couple or six hard shoves and dragged me out of bed. Two other deputies had grabbed her and were calling her a procuress and a witch. Who could have thought such a thing about a woman who lived the life I have described!

On hearing the constable's shouts and my loud complaints, her actual lover, a fruit-seller who was in the inner bedroom, took off running. They saw him and learned from another house guest that I was the wrong one, so they took off after the scoundrel and grabbed him, leaving me pummeled and bruised. Yet despite all my troubles, I laughed at what the scoundrels were saying to Guía. One of them looked at her and said, "A bishop's miter would look great on you, mother! I'd be so happy to see you consecrate three thousand turnips to your service!" Another: "The magistrates have already selected the plumes for you to wear at your gala coming-out." Finally they brought the scoundrel back and tied up the two of them. They begged my pardon and left me there, alone.

I was a little relieved to see my good landlady in the position she was in, so my one remaining concern was to get out of bed in time to throw my own orange at her. Though, from the things a serving girl who remained in the house told me, I was not sure she would stay in jail, for she mentioned something about flying and other things I did not like the sound of.

I stayed there one more week, recuperating and barely able to go outside. I got a dozen stitches on my face and had to use crutches.

I found myself penniless, for my hundred *reales* had gone to pay for food and lodging. So, to keep from racking up still more expenses with no money to pay for them, I decided to leave the house on my two crutches and sell my suit, collars, and doublet, all of which were very good. I did that, and with what they gave me I bought an old cordovan buff coat and a fabulous sackcloth doublet, my poor man's hooded coat, long and patched, my leggings, and some big old shoes. I wore the hood of my coat over my head, a bronze crucifix dangling from my collar, and a rosary. A poor beggar who understood the art of begging very well drilled me in the proper doleful tone and phrases, and so I soon began to practice it myself on the street. I sewed my remaining sixty *reales* into my doublet. And with that, I became a beggar, relying on my good patter.

I walked the streets for a week, howling in doleful tones upraised in prayer, after this fashion: "Good Christian, servant of Our Lord! Alms for this beggar, covered in wounds and sores, doing the best that I can!" That is what I said on workdays; on feast days I started off in a different tone, and said: "Faithful Christians and followers of Our Lord, by the great high lady who is the Queen of Angels, the Mother of God, give alms to this lame beggar, crippled by the hand of the Lord!" And I would leave a short pause—that is extremely important—then quickly add: "Bad luck and miasmic air caught me at work in a vineyard and twisted my limbs. Before, I was as hale and hearty as you are, and as I pray you shall remain, praise God!"

At that, the pennies came pinging down and I made plenty of money. And I would have done better if I had not crossed paths with a great big lad with an ugly face, no arms, and one leg missing, who scooted around the same streets as me on a little cart and collected more alms with his ill-bred begging. He would say, in a hoarse tone rising to a shriek, "Servant of Christ, remember the Lord's punishment for my sins! Alms for the poor is an offering to God!" And he would add, "For sweet Jeez!" And he made more money than you can imagine. I observed this and stopped saying "Jesus," dropping the "-us" as he did, and that stirred up more devotion. In a word, I switched my phrasing and took in a wonderful haul.

I kept my legs bound together inside a leather bag and used my two crutches. I slept in the doorway of a surgeon's house, sharing it with a street-corner beggar, one of the biggest rascals God ever made. He was very rich, and he was like our leader. He made more money than any of us. He had a huge hernia, and he would tie one of his upper arms with a cord to make his hand look swollen, maimed, and

inflamed, all at once. He would lie face-up on his street corner with his hernia hanging out, the size of a cannonball, and say, "Look on poverty, and on the cross that the Lord gives a Christian to bear!" If a woman went by, he would say, "Beautiful lady, may God be with your spirit!" And because he addressed them like this, most women would give him alms and would even go out of their way to pass by his street corner. If a foot soldier went by, he would say, "Hello, Captain, sir!" And if it were any old man, "Hello, my fine gentleman!" If someone went by in a carriage, he would immediately call him "Your Excellency," and he would call a priest on a mule an archdeacon. In a word, he was a frightful flatterer. He had a different way of begging on saints' days. I came to have such a close friendship with him that he revealed a secret that made us both rich in a couple of days. It was that this beggar had three young boys who collected alms on the street and stole whatever they could. They answered to him, and he safeguarded all their money. He was also partners with two little boys who collected for religious orders, sharing what they pilfered from their collection boxes.

With the advice I got from this excellent teacher and the lessons he gave me, I went in for the same proposition, and he directed the little ones who were fit for the job my way. In less than a month, I had more than two hundred *reales*, free and clear. Finally he revealed to me, intending we should go partners, the beggar's greatest secret and highest scam, and we did it together. And it was this: we stole children. Four or five of them, every day, between the two of us. When the town crier announced the missing child, we would come ask him about distinguishing marks, and we would say, "You know, sir, I saw him at such-and-such a time, and if I hadn't come along he would have been run over by an ox-cart. I have him at home." They would give us the reward, and we got so rich that I soon found myself with fifty ducats.

Now fully healed, though I still kept my legs wrapped in bandages, I resolved to leave the Capital and make my way to Toledo, where I knew no one and no one knew me. Finally I made up my mind. I bought a gray traveling suit, a collar, and a sword, said good-bye to Valcázar, the beggar I have been talking about, and nosed around the taverns for a ride to Toledo.

9

In Which I Become an Actor, Poet, and Gentleman Friend of Nuns

In an inn I met a company of actors who were going to Toledo. They had three wagons, and as God willed it one member of the company was a former classmate of mine from Alcalá who had given up his studies to work on the stage. I told him how much I wanted to go there and get out of the Capital. The man barely recognized me after the way I got knifed, and when he saw the broad scar across my face he never stopped crossing himself.

In the end, he did me the kindness (for my money) of convincing the others to give me room to join them. We were all shuffled together, men and women. One of the women, the dancer who also played queens and other serious parts in plays, struck me as an incredible minx. It turned out that her husband was sitting next to me. Carried away by my desire for love and for enjoying her, and not imagining who I was talking to, I said to him, "That woman—how could we arrange to talk to her? Like, if I wanted to spend, say, twenty ducats on her? Because she strikes me as very pretty."

"It isn't mine to tell you, because I'm her husband," the man said. "Or even to discuss this. But, setting passion aside, since that's not exactly what motivates me, you could spend any amount of money you want on her, because there's no flesh like hers on earth, or such a frisky little woman."

And having said this, he jumped off the wagon and moved to another, apparently to give me space to talk to her. The man's reply pleased me, and I realized that some rascal might say men like him were carrying out Saint Paul's precept of "having wives as though you have none," maliciously twisting his decree.[107] I took advantage of the opportunity and talked to her. She asked me where I was going and a little about my life. Finally, after many words, we agreed to leave the deeds for Toledo.

107. I Corinthians 7:29, "This therefore I say, brethren: The time is short. It remaineth, that they also who have wives be as if they had none." This allusion was censored in the printed version of the novel.

We enjoyed a long and very merry ride.[108] I chanced to recite a bit of the "Comedy of Saint Alexis," which I remembered from when I was a boy, and I recited it in a way that raised their interest.[109] And since my friend in the company had learned about my disasters and discomforts from what I had told him, he asked me if I wanted to join them. They talked up the mummer's life to no end. For my part, I needed a means of support and I sort of liked the young woman, so I came to an agreement with the producer. I signed a contract to remain with his troop for two years, and he gave me my allowance and my roles. And with that, we arrived in Toledo.

They gave me three or four preludes and the roles of older men, since they suited my voice well. I carefully studied them all and I recited the first prelude we did there.[110] It was about a ship that was wrecked and had run out of provisions, like every ship in every prelude. I recited the line about "here is the port," addressed the audience as "the Senate," begged their pardons for mistakes and silences, and exited. There was some rote applause, and, in a word, I made a good impression in the theater.

We performed a comedy by one of our performers. I was amazed that performers could be poets, because I had thought that poetry writing was for very wise and learned men, not for such utterly unlettered people. And now writing plays is all the fashion. There is no producer who doesn't write comedies, no performer who doesn't create his own play about Moors and Christians. I remember the days when, if it wasn't a comedy by the great Lope de Vega or by Remón, it was nothing at all.[111]

Anyway, the comedy was performed on the first day, and nobody could follow it. The second day, we started performing, and thank God

108. The forty-five-mile journey from Madrid to Toledo would have taken two or three days.

109. In this period, a comedy was a play in simple language with an uplifting ending. "La comedia de San Alexo" is found in *Cancionero general de la Doctrina Christiana* (1579), a collection of short religious plays for schoolboys compiled by a schoolmaster in Alcalá de Henares, Juan López de Úbeda. There are interesting parallels and contrasts between Pablos' life and the life of the legendary Saint Alexis, a rich man in early Christian Rome who fled an arranged marriage and became a pious beggar.

110. A *loa* or prelude was a short piece in verse that served to get the audience settled and ready to pay attention to the main play.

111. Fray Alonso Remón (1561–1632) and his better-remembered contemporary Lope de Vega were the most prolific and popular playwrights of Golden Age Spain.

it opened with a war scene and I came out wearing armor and holding a buckler, because otherwise I would have met my end under a mound of rotten quinces, cabbage stalks, and melons. Such a whirlwind has never been seen, and the comedy deserved it, because it had a king of Normandy dressed in a hermit's habit for no reason at all, and it threw in two footmen for laughs, and at the untanglement of the tangled plot, what else but everybody gets married, and there you go. In a word, we got our just deserts.

All of us, especially me, gave our poetic colleague a hard time, telling him he should always remember the mess we barely escaped and learn his lesson. He told me that nothing in the comedy was his own. Instead, he had patched that beggar's cape together, sewing a scene from this play onto a scene from that. The only problem with it was his poor stitching. He admitted to me that the players who wrote comedies had a lot of stolen property to answer for, because they made use of every play they had ever acted in. He said it was very easy to do, and it was the enticement of making three hundred or four hundred *reales* that made them take such risks. The other thing was that, since they traveled around all these towns, all sorts of people read them their comedies. "We take their comedies to look at them, we hold onto them, and after adding a few dumb lines here and cutting a few well-phrased lines there, we say it's ours." And he assured me that no player ever has been able to write a stanza any other way.

It did not sound like a bad scheme to me, and I admit that I was inclined in that direction because I had a bit of a natural disposition towards poetry and had read Garcilaso.[112] So I made up my mind to go in for the art. And between that and the actress and performing, my life went on. After we had been in Toledo for a month, putting on good comedies and making up for that first mistake, I had already made a name for myself and had come to be called Alonsete (for I had told everyone my name was Alonso). They also called me "the Cruel," after a cruel character I had played to the great delight of the groundlings and the common rabble. I already owned three suits, and producers were trying to lure me away from the company. I was already talking like I knew all about comedy, finding fault with famous actors, criticizing the faces Pineda made, giving my thoughts on Sánchez's natural ease, calling Morales good enough.[113] They asked for my verdict on

112. Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–1536) introduced Italian Renaissance forms into Spanish poetry and set the stage for Golden Age literature.

113. Pineda, Sánchez, and Morales were famous actors of the day.

the stage decorations and had me work out the scene changes. If any would-be playwright came to read us his new comedy, I was the one who heard it.

In the end, inspired by all this applause, I lost my poetic virginity on a little ballad. Then I did a comic interlude and thought it turned out not bad. I dared a comedy, and to make sure it would be divine I wrote it about Our Lady of the Rosary. It opened with clarions; it had its souls in Purgatory and its demons, which were in style at the time, coming on stage with their "boo, boo, boos" and exiting with their "scree, scree, screes." The town was very amused to hear the name of Satan in my verses, followed by arguments about how he fell from Heaven and so on. In a word, my comedy went on stage and it worked out very well.

My hands were full of work, because all sorts of lovers came to me, some to ask for verses about eyebrows, others about eyes. This one wanted a sonnet about hands, that one a little ballad about hair. Every item had its price. But since there were other shops, I would reduce them to bargains to keep the people flocking to mine. You want carols? I was swimming in sextons and nunnery errand girls. Blind men practically supported me on prayers alone, eight *reales* apiece, and I recall writing a "Just Judge" prayer at the time in solemn and sententious verse that went well with theatrical gestures. I wrote some fabulous verses for one blind man who put his own name on them. They began:

> Mother of the Word made flesh,
> Daughter of Our Father divine,
> Thy grace virginal hath blest, etc.

I was the first one to introduce the idea of ending verses the same way preachers end their sermons, with "grace here and glory hereafter," in these verses about a captive in Tetouan:[114]

> Let us plead our honest story
> To the King on high untouched by waste,
> That, seeing our faith vindicatory,
> He may here deign to give us grace
> And in the beyond, give us His Glory. Amen.

114. Tetouan, directly across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain, was a frequent site of military conflict between Spain and the Ottoman Empire.

I was going great guns with all this, rich and prosperous, and I reached the point where I almost aspired to become a producer. I had furnished my house nicely, because I had hit on a devilishly clever stratagem for getting tapestries on the cheap, which was to buy the old ones from taverns and hang them on my walls. They cost me twenty or thirty *reales*, but for looks they were better than the King's: the ones I bought were so threadbare you could look right through them, while you cannot see anything through his.

One day the best thing in the world happened to me, and I have to tell it even though it ought to offend me. On days when I wrote comedies, I used to hole up in the attic of my place, and there I would stay and there I would eat. A maid would bring up my food and leave it for me. I had the habit, when writing, of performing what I wrote out loud, as if on stage. The devil so ordered it that at the exact hour and minute when the maid was climbing the dark and narrow staircase, bringing up the plates and the stewpot, I was in the middle of a hunting scene and shouting at the top of my lungs as I composed my comedy, which went:

> Beware the bear! Beware the bear!
> It left me here all torn to shreds
> And now bears down on you, I swear!

When the maid, who was from Galicia, heard me say "it left me here" and "now bears down on you," she thought it was true and that I was warning her. So she turns to run, and in her confusion she trips over her skirt and tumbles down the length of the staircase, spilling the pot and breaking the plates. Then she runs out into the street screaming that a bear is killing a man. Fast as I ran out to stop her, the whole neighborhood was already there asking me about the bear. Even when I explained that it had all been the maid's ignorance and that it was just the comedy I had been writing, they did not want to believe me. I had no dinner that day. My companions found out, and the story went all over the city. And these things kept happening to me so long as I persevered in my trade as poet and refused to abandon my wicked ways.

But it so happened that some people found out how well my producer had done for himself in Toledo. They had his property seized to satisfy some debt or other (producers always seem to meet this end) and had him thrown in jail. With that, our company broke up and we each went our separate ways. To tell the truth, my companions tried to get me to join other companies, but since I did not aspire to such

jobs and only took them out of necessity, now that I was comfortably settled and had plenty of money I only cared about enjoying myself.

I bid them all farewell. They went on. For my part, I intended to abandon my wicked life now that I was not an actor, but instead—and I hope you do not take offense at this, sir—I became a creature of habit, a lover of the grate. To speak more clearly, I was a candidate for Antichrist, that is to say, a gentleman friend of nuns. I had occasion to do this because one nun, at whose request I had written many carols, took a liking to me when she saw my Corpus performance, in which I played Saint John the Evangelist.[115] The woman carefully doted on me, and she had told me that she was only sorry that I was an actor, because I pretended to be the son of a great gentleman, which moved her to pity. Finally, I decided to write her the following note:

"More to please you than to seek my own interest I have left the company, for any company without yours is lonesomeness. I shall be more yours the more I become my own man. Send me word of when the next visiting hour will be so that I shall know when I shall be happy," etc.

The nunnery message girl brought her the note. You would not believe how very happy the good nun was to learn of my new ways. She replied as follows:

"I shall withhold my congratulations for your good news rather than give it now, and it would pain me were I not certain that my will and your benefit are all one. Let us say that you have returned to your senses. Nothing remains now but your perseverance, which I shall measure against my own. Visiting hours are unlikely today, but do not fail to come to Vespers, for we shall see one another there, and then through the nunnery windows; and perhaps I shall be able to pull one over on the Abbess. Until then, good-bye."

The note pleased me, for the woman really was intelligent and pretty. I ate dinner and put on the outfit I used to wear when I played handsome young suitors in comedies. I went straight to the church, prayed, and started looking through every loop and hole in the iron grate to see if she would appear. Then, thanks to God and good luck (though it was more like the devil and ill luck), I hear the good old signal: she starts coughing, I start coughing, and before you know it

115. There were two factions of nuns, at least in Golden Age literature (the underlying social reality is unclear): fans of Saint John the Evangelist and fans of Saint John the Baptist, each faction rooting for its favorite saint as if the two were rival pop stars or sports teams. Pablos' nun is a fan of the Evangelist.

there's a pandemonium of hacking. Between our two fake colds it sounded like somebody had tossed pepper into the church. Finally, I coughed until I was exhausted, but then an old nun walks up, coughing, to stand on the other side of the grate. That was when I realized how unlucky I had been. For coughing is a very dangerous signal to use in a convent, since what is a signal for girls is a way of life for old women, and sometimes a man thinks he hears the trilling of a nightingale but it turns out to be the cackling of a crow.

I stayed at church for a long time, until Solemn Vespers began. I sat through the whole service. This is why they call the gentlemen friends of nuns "solemn lovers," with all their vespers. Also because they never leave the evening services happy, since their big day never arrives. You would not believe how many services I attended. My neck grew about two yards after I started courting, just from stretching to get a peek. I became good friends with the sexton and the altar boy and was very well received by the priest, a merry man. I got so stiff, I looked like I lunched on skewers and dined on iron rods.

I went to stand by the nunnery windows. The church plaza was quite large, but you still had to line up early to reserve a spot, like it was opening day for a new comedy. It was swarming with worshipers. In the end, I stood where I could. And there, as oddities to be gawked at, were the lovers' various postures. This fellow, staring unblinkingly with his sword in one hand and his rosary in the other, stood still as a stone statue over a tomb. The other one, palms uplifted, stretched his arms heavenward like Saint Francis receiving the stigmata. That one, his mouth gaping wider than an overdemanding woman's, displayed his entrails to his beloved through his gullet. Another one, leaning his ponderous weight against the wall, looked like he was testing his strength against the bricks. One over here was pacing back and forth, as if she was supposed to choose him for his gait like a he-mule. That other, waving a tiny letter, looked like a hunter holding up a bit of meat to summon his falcon. The jealous ones formed a different group: some stood together in tight knots, laughing and looking at their loves; others read verses and flourished them about. This one tried to make his beloved jealous by strolling through the plaza with another woman on his arm, while that one talked to a maid who was passing him information in secret.

This was in the lower part where we stood. But the upper part, where the nuns were, was also a sight to see, because the nunnery had its windows in a small tower entirely covered with slits and a wall as full of holes as a sieve or a potpourri ball. Through every hole came

tantalizing glimpses. Here you could see a tidbit of neck, here a hand, there a foot. Elsewhere there were the sort of dishes usually served on Saturdays: heads and tongues, though brains were lacking. Over there you could find a whole trinket shop: one nun displayed her rosary, another waved her handkerchief, elsewhere a glove peeked through, over there a green ribbon. Some talked a bit too loudly, others coughed, and one hissed like a hatmaker calling out to a customer or like a child trying to puff away a spider.

In summer it is something to see how the men not only warm themselves but sizzle in the sun. How delightful to see the nuns so cold and the men so hot. In winter it gets so damp that watercress could grow on our bodies. If it snows, it snows on us, and no cloud passes by without dropping some rain on us. And we do all this, when you get right down to it, to look at a woman through an iron grate and glass windows, like looking at the bones of a saint. It is like falling in love with a blackbird in a cage, if she speaks, or with a portrait if she doesn't. Their favors just nudge the game ball, never knock it through the hoop. It is playing patty-cake with your fingertips. They lean their heads against the grates and aim their sweet talk like archers through the arrowslits in the tower wall. Their love is a game of hide-and-seek. To see men talking so softly it sounds like prayer! Putting up with a quarrelsome old woman, a demanding maid, and the lying nun who guards the door! The best of it all is to see the jealous accusations the nuns level at us over women here on the outside, while claiming that theirs is the only true love, and the demonically convoluted arguments that they offer in proof.

By the end, I was calling the abbess "ma'am," the vicar "father," and the sexton "brother." The things a desperate man comes to over time. I was getting tired of the way the nuns who guarded the door kept dismissing me, and the way the other nuns kept demanding me. I considered how much it was costing me to reach Hell this way, when others get there so easily on the cheap. I saw how I was damning myself hand over fist, yet going to Hell only by my sense of touch. When I talked to her, I usually pressed my head so hard against the grate to keep bystanders from overhearing that the bars remained imprinted on my forehead for two days, and I spoke like a priest mumbling the words of consecration. Everybody who saw me said, "Damn good-for-nothing nun-lover!" and worse.

All this had me ruminating my options, and it almost got me to make up my mind to leave the nun, even if it meant losing my means of support. I made up my mind on the feast day of Saint John the

Evangelist, because that was when I finally understood what nuns are. All you need to know, sir, is that the nuns who preferred Saint John the Baptist purposely used such harsh, loud voices that instead of singing Mass, they were howling it. They did not wash their faces, and they dressed in old rags. To discredit the celebrations, the lovers of the pro-Baptist nuns brought benches instead of chairs to church as well as dozens of scoundrels from the cattle market. After I saw how the nuns, some favoring one Saint John and the others pushing for the other one, heaped indecent abuse on them both, I managed to wheedle fifty ducats' worth of embroidery, silk stockings, little bags of perfume, and sweets from my own nun under the pretext of raising money for the nunnery in a raffle, and I took off for Seville. I feared that if I stuck around much longer, I would find mandrakes growing in the visiting chamber. How grieved the nun felt, more on account of what I took than on account of me, I will leave the pious reader to ponder.

10

What Happened to Me in Seville until I Embarked for the Indies

I traveled the road from Toledo to Seville in comfort, for I had already acquired the rudiments of card-sharping, and I carried a set of dice newly loaded for high and low, and my right hand was good at cover-ups (pregnant with four dice, it gave birth to three), and I carried a supply of card stock, both wide and narrow, for making garrotes of polls and fleams.[116] So I was never at a loss for money. I had lots of other dodges, but I will refrain from mentioning them because I do not want people to think I spent all my time dodging carts or

116. Garrotes of polls and fleams (*garrotes de morro y ballestilla*): presumably ways of marking cards; the exact meaning is lost. Regarding dice, Spanish gamblers played with a set of three; by holding four dice and palming one of his loaded pair, Pablos could make his roll go higher or lower at will.

something, but also because it is better to present examples worth emulating than to mention vices men should eschew. But perhaps if I lay out a few ruses and turns of speech, the ignorant will be better warned, and if the readers of my book get tricked they will have only themselves to blame.

Don't think you are safe, my man, just because you use your own deck, because they will switch it on you in the blink of an eye.[117] Watch out for rough edges and grease stains on cards, which cardsharps use to mark the low cards. In case you are a scullion, reader, be aware that in kitchens and stables they mark the low cards by pressing a pinhead into them or bending them. And if you associate with honest gentlemen, stay away from cards, which were conceived in sin at the printer's shop and which, having stripes printed across their backs, foretell what is to come. Don't trust a clean deck, since all the soap in the world isn't enough to keep a player who peeks and palms from playing dirty. If you play parar, make sure the dealer does not bend the face cards (other than kings) more than the spots; doing so hurts the cards, but worse than the toll it takes on them is the tolling of the bells for your money as it passes away. And see that the dealer does not discard on top of the draw pile, and watch out that nobody uses finger signals or the first letters of words to signal which cards they want to draw.

I don't want to throw any more light on these things for you. That's plenty for you to realize that you should live prudently, because there must be countless dirty tricks I've left out. "Making a killing" is what they call it when they take all your money, and rightly so; a "double-cross" is when a player plots against his own partner—a scheme so twisted, doubled over, and crossed up that nobody can understand it; "ropers" are the men who round up the sheep so that these purse-butchers can fleece them; a "mark" is a man who knows no evil and is as good as the day is long, while the one who marks all the good man's precautions for destruction is the "shark."

Well, using this language and these dodges got me to Seville: I won money off my traveling companions to pay for the rent of the mules, and I won my meals and spending change from the guests at the inns along the way. In Seville I went straight to put up at an inn, the Meson

117. Here Pablos addresses a common reader instead of the anonymous "Sir"; in Spanish, he uses the familiar *tú* rather than the respectful *vuestra merced*. The translation of the following sentences is a partly speculative interpretation of seventeenth-century gambling slang, details of which remain mysterious.

del Moro,[118] where I ran into a classmate of mine from Alcalá named Mata, but now he thought that name did not sound tough enough, so he was going by Matorral. He dealt in lives and was a scar-monger, and things were not going badly for him. He kept samples on his face, using the ones he had received to bargain over the length and depth of the ones he was contracted to administer. He used to say, "There's no finer master of the art than the man who's been properly slashed," and he was right, because his face was a leather jerkin. He himself was a leather wineskin, constantly sloshed. He told me I really had to go have supper with him and some other pals, who would make sure I made it back to the inn.

I went. We got to his place and he said, "Whoa! Take off that cloak and look like a man, because tonight you're gonna meet all the stand-up guys in Seville. And if you don't want 'em to take you for a wuss, mess up that collar and hunch up your back; push that cloak down around your heels, because we're always down at heels; screw up that snout of yours; wave your hands around whenever you talk; and drop all your *h*'s where they should be and add *h*'s where they shouldn't. Repeat after me: *'aymarket, 'ogback, 'ungry, 'urt, hangry, hace in the 'ole*, and *jug o' hale*."[119]

I learned it all by heart. He loaned me a dagger as wide as a scimitar and long enough he could have called it a sword, though he did not. "Here," he said, "take this quart of unwatered wine and drink up, because if you don't have booze on your breath you won't seem tough."

In the middle of this, and me woozy from wine, in walked four of them with gouty shoes for faces, swinging and swaying, not wrapped in their cloaks but sashed around their waists, hats pushed forward over their foreheads, brims upturned in front so they looked like halos, enough daggers and swords to stock two whole blacksmith shops, tips of their scabbards banging against their right heels, drooping eyes, tough looks, mustaches pointed as horns, and Turkish beards like horsetails. They gestured to us with their mouths, then they said to my friend, in surly tones, clipping their words, "S'up."

"S'up, pal," my tutor replied.

118. This "Inn of the Moor" stood near the entrance to the former Jewish quarter (Cabo Aseguinolaza 2011: 174).

119. Matorral is the complete stereotype of the low-life tough guy from Seville, including his Andalusian pronunciation of the Spanish *j*, which Quevedo parodies here.

They sat down. To ask who I was, instead of uttering so much as a word, one of them just looked at Matorral, opened his mouth, and jutted his lower lip in my direction to point me out. My new teacher satisfied the tough's curiosity by holding his beard in his hand and looking down. At that, they all stood up and gave me a hug, and I hugged them back, which was like sampling four different wines.

Soon it was time for supper. Some of the scoundrels that the tough guys call "touts" came to serve us. We sat around the table. A dish of pickled capers materialized. To start off, they welcomed me by drinking my honor; until I saw it drunk, I had no idea how much honor I possessed. Fish and meat came next, and with it more appetite for drink. There was a kneading trough on the floor full to the brim with wine, and anybody who wanted to answer a toast could just stick his head in and guzzle. I loved that little flask. After two sips, nobody recognized anybody.

They turned to talk of war. The oaths and curses multiplied; from one toast to the next, twenty or thirty men died without confession. They prescribed the mayor a death by a thousand stabs. They drank to the memories of Domingo Tiznado and Gayón. Gallons of wine were spilled to the soul of Escamilla; the grief-stricken wept tender tears over the untimely end of Alonso Álvarez.[120] Hearing all this, my friend got a screw loose in his head. He picked up a loaf in both hands and, staring at the light, said in a rather hoarse voice: "By this bread, which is the Face of God, and by the Light whose birth the angel announced, if youse guys want, tonight we'll get back at the deputy who dragged in poor One-Eye Álvarez."

A monstrous shriek rose up among them, and, unsheathing their daggers, they swore to it. Placing their hands around the brim of the trough and plunging their snouts into the wine, they said: "Sure as we're drinking this wine, we'll drink the blood of all them rats!"

"Who is this Alonso Álvarez," I asked, "for you all to be so broken up about his death?"

"A tough," one of them said, "a gutsy fighter, a handy lad with a dagger, and a good companion. Come on, guys, the devils are starting to tempt me again!"

120. Figures from the criminal underworld of Seville, though the first three are known only from scattered references in literary works. Alonso Álvarez de Soria, alias El Tuerto ("One-Eye"), was a respected poet as well as a known criminal. He was hanged in 1604 by order of the new mayor of Seville, who held a grudge over a set of insulting satiric verses that Álvarez had written about him.

With that, we left the house to go deputy hunting. I had given myself over to the wine, turning control of my senses over to it, so I did not notice the danger I was putting myself into. We reached Calle de la Mar,[121] where we came face to face with the night watch. As soon as they caught sight of the deputies, they drew their swords and attacked. I joined in, and we cleansed two bodies of their accursed souls in the first clash. The constable let his feet deliver justice: he ran away, shouting up and down the street for aid. Our little bender kept us from running after him, so in the end we took refuge in the Cathedral, where we found asylum from the rigors of justice and slept as long as necessary for the wine that was fizzing in our skulls to go flat. When we were finally back in our right minds, I was amazed to find that the watch had lost two deputies and the constable had been driven off by a cluster of fermented grapes, which is all we were at the time.

We had a fantastic time in the Cathedral, because the scent of fugitives attracted nymphs, who gave us the shirts off their own backs to keep us in clothes. One of the girls, named Grajales, took a liking to me. She watched my back right from the start. I loved this way of life better than any I had known, so I proposed to sail this sea of grief with La Grajal until death should us part. I studied the tough guys' ways, and in a few days I was the rabbi of all ruffians.

The King's justice did not forget to pursue us. They constantly made their rounds in front of our Cathedral, but for all that, from midnight on we put on disguises and snuck out to make our own rounds. When I saw how this business just kept on going, and especially how fortune kept dogging me, well, it was not that I learned my lesson (I am not that sensible), but I got tired of it, and being an obstinate sinner I made up my mind, after first consulting with La Grajal, to take passage to the Indies with her and see if changing worlds and countries might improve my luck. And it went worse for me, as you will see in Part Two, sir; for a man will never improve his station if he only changes where he lives, and not his life and customs.

121. Now called Calle García de Vinuesa, this street led from the Cathedral of Seville to the broad, sandy banks of the Guadalquiver River that served as the city's port to the sea, which lies some fifty miles downriver. In later years the river silted up and ocean-going ships grew too large to reach Seville by river.